

counter-avarices of these united hatreds had a struggle before they decided on the paltry blood-money. If so, the astute Jewish priests beat down the poor ignorant Jewish Apostle. For all that they offered and all they paid was thirty pieces of silver—about £3 16s.—the ransom-money of the meanest slave. For this price he was to sell his Master, and in selling his Master to sell his own life, and to gain in return the execration of the world for all generations yet to come. And so, for the last week of his own and his Master's life, Judas moved about with the purpose of murder in his dark and desperate heart. But as yet no day had been fixed, no plan decided on—only the betrayal paid for; and there seems to have been a general conviction that it would not do to make the attempt during the actual feast, lest there should be an uproar among the multitude who accepted Him, and especially among the dense throngs of pilgrims from His native Galilee. They believed that many opportunities would occur, either at Jerusalem or elsewhere, when the Great Pass-over was finished, and the Holy City had relapsed into its ordinary calm.

And the events of the following day would be likely to give the most emphatic confirmation to the worldly wisdom of their wicked decision.

LESSON TWENTY-FIVE

CHAPTER XLIX.

PALM SUNDAY.

THERE seems to have been a general impression for some time beforehand that, in spite of all which had recently happened, Jesus would still be present at the Paschal Feast. The probability of this had incessantly been debated among the people, and the expected arrival of the Prophet of Galilee was looked forward to with intense curiosity and interest.

Consequently, when it became known early on Sunday morning that during the day He would certainly enter the Holy City, the excitement was very great. The news would be spread by some of the numerous Jews who had visited Bethany on the previous evening, after the sunset had closed the Sabbath, and thus enabled them to

exceed the limits of the Sabbath day's journey. Thus it was that a very great multitude was prepared to receive and welcome the Deliverer who had raised the dead.

He started on foot. Three roads led from Bethany over the Mount of Olives to Jerusalem. One of these passes between its northern and central summits; the other ascends the highest point of the mountain, and slopes down through the modern village of Et Tur; the third, which is, and always must have been, the main road, sweeps round the southern shoulder of the central mass, between it and the "Hill of Evil Counsel." The others are rather mountain paths than roads, and as Jesus was attended by so many disciples, it is clear that He took the third and easiest route.

Passing from under the palm-trees of Bethany, they approached the fig-gardens of Bethphage, the "House of Figs," a small suburb or hamlet of undiscovered site, which lay probably a little to the south of Bethany, and in sight of it. To this village, or some other hamlet which lay near it, Jesus dispatched two of His disciples. The minute description of the spot given by St. Mark makes us suppose that Peter was one of them, and if so he was probably accompanied by John. Jesus told him that when they got to the village they should find an ass tied, and a colt with her; these they were to loose and bring to Him, and if any objection arose on the part of the owner, it would at once be silenced by telling him that "the Lord had need of them." Everything happened as He had said. In the passage round the house—*i.e.*, tied up at the back of the house—they found the ass and the foal, which was adapted for its sacred purpose because it had never yet been used. The owners, on hearing their object, at once permitted them to take the animals, and they led them to Jesus, putting their garments over them to do Him regal honour. Then they lifted Him upon the colt, and the triumphal procession set forth. It was no seditious movement to stir up political enthusiasm, no "insulting vanity" to commemorate ambitious triumph. Nay, it was a mere outburst of provincial joy, the simple exultation of poor Galilæans and despised disciples. He rides, not upon a war-horse, but on an animal which was the symbol of peace. The haughty Gentiles, had they witnessed the humble procession, would have utterly derided it, as indeed they did deride the record of it; but the Apostles recalled in after days that it fulfilled the prophecy of Zechariah: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Sion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem; behold, thy King cometh unto thee; He is meek, and having salvation;

lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass." Yes, it was a procession of very lowly pomp, and yet beside it how do the grandest triumphs of aggressive war and unjust conquest sink into utter insignificance and disgrace!

Jesus mounted the unused foal, while probably some of His disciples led it by the bridle. And no sooner had He started than the multitude spread out their upper garments to tapestry His path, and kept tearing or cutting down the boughs of olive, and fig, and walnut, to scatter them before Him. Then, in a burst of enthusiasm, the disciples broke into the shout, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" and the multitude caught up the joyous strain, and told each other how He had raised Lazarus from the dead.

The road slopes by a gradual ascent up the Mount of Olives, through green fields and under shady trees, till it suddenly sweeps round to the northward. It is at this angle of the road that Jerusalem, which hitherto has been hidden by the shoulder of the hill, bursts full upon the view. There, through the clear atmosphere, rising out of the deep umbrageous valleys which surrounded it, the city of ten thousand memories stood clear before Him, and the morning sunlight, as it blazed on the marble pinnacles and gilded roofs of the Temple buildings, was reflected in a very fiery splendour which forced the spectator to avert his glance. Such a glimpse of such a city is at all times affecting, and many a Jewish and Gentile traveller has reined his horse at this spot, and gazed upon the scene in emotion too deep for speech. But the Jerusalem of that day, with "its imperial mantle of proud towers," was regarded as one of the wonders of the world, and was a spectacle incomparably more magnificent than the decayed and crumbling city of to-day. And who can interpret, who can enter into the mighty rush of divine compassion which, at that spectacle, shook the Saviour's soul? As He gazed on that "mass of gold and snow," was there no pride, no exultation in the heart of its true King? Far from it! He had dropped *silent* tears at the grave of Lazarus; here He wept aloud. All the shame of His mockery, all the anguish of His torture, was powerless, five days afterwards, to extort from Him a single groan, or to wet His eyelids with one trickling tear; but here, all the pity that was within Him overmastered His human spirit, and He not only wept, but broke into a passion of lamentation, in which the choked voice seemed to struggle for its utterance. A strange Messianic triumph! a strange interruption of the festal cries!

The Deliverer weeps over the city which it is now too late to save; the King prophecies the utter ruin of the nation which He came to rule! "If thou hadst known," He cried—while the wondering multitudes looked on, and knew not what to think or say—"If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in thy day, the things that belong unto thy peace!"—and there sorrow interrupted the sentence, and, when He found voice to continue, He could only add, "but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another, because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation." It was the last invitation from "the Glory of God on the Mount of Olives," before that Shechinah vanished from their eyes for ever.

Sternly, literally, terribly, within fifty years, was that prophecy fulfilled. Four years before the war began, while as yet the city was in the greatest peace and prosperity, a melancholy maniac traversed its streets with the repeated cry, "A voice from the east, a voice from the west, a voice from the four winds, a voice against Jerusalem and the holy house, and a voice against the bridegrooms and the brides, and a voice against this whole people;" nor could any scourgings or tortures wring from him any other words except "Woe! woe! to Jerusalem; woe to the city; woe to the people; woe to the holy house!" until seven years afterwards, during the siege, he was killed by a stone from a catapult. His voice was but the renewed echo of the voice of prophecy.

Titus had not originally wished to encompass the city, but he was forced, by the despair and obstinacy of the Jews, to surround it, first with a palisaded mound, and then, when this *vallum* and *agger* were destroyed, with a wall of masonry. He did not wish to sacrifice the Temple—nay, he made every possible effort to save it—but he was forced to leave it in ashes. He did not intend to be cruel to the inhabitants, but the deadly fanaticism of their opposition so extinguished all desire to spare them, that he undertook the task of well-nigh exterminating the race—of crucifying them by hundreds, of exposing them in the amphitheatre by thousands, of selling them into slavery by myriads. Josephus tells us that, even immediately after the siege of Titus, no one, in the desert waste around him, would have recognised the beauty of Judæa; and that if any Jew had come upon the city of a

sudden, however well he had known it before, he would have asked "what place it was?" And he who, in modern Jerusalem, would look for relics of the ten-times-captured city of the days of Christ, must look for them twenty feet beneath the soil, and will scarcely find them. In one spot alone remain a few massive substructions, as though to show how vast is the ruin they represent; and here, on every Friday, assemble a few poverty-stricken Jews, to stand each in the shroud in which he will be buried, and wail over the shattered glories of their fallen and desecrated home.

There had been a pause in the procession while Jesus shed His bitter tears and uttered his prophetic lamentation. But now the people in the valley of Kedron, and about the walls of Jerusalem, and the pilgrims whose booths and tents stood so thickly on the green slopes below, had caught sight of the approaching company, and heard the echo of the glad shouts, and knew what the commotion meant. At that time the palms were numerous in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem, though now but a few remain: and tearing down their green and graceful branches, the people streamed up the road to meet the approaching Prophet. And when the two streams of people met—those who had accompanied Him from Bethany, and those who had come to meet Him from Jerusalem—they left Him riding in the midst, and some preceding, some following Him, advanced, shouting "Hosannas" and waving branches, to the gate of Jerusalem.

Mingled among the crowd were some of the Pharisees, and the joy of the multitude was to them gall and wormwood. What meant these Messianic cries and kingly titles? Were they not dangerous and unseemly? Why did He allow them? "Master, rebuke Thy disciples." But He would not do so. "If these should hold their peace," He said, "the stones would immediately cry out." The words may have recalled to them the threats which occur, amid denunciations against covetousness and cruelty, and the utter destruction by which they should be avenged, in the prophet Habakkuk—"For the stone shall cry out of the wall, and the beam out of the timber shall answer it." The Pharisees felt that they were powerless to stay the flood of enthusiasm.

And when they reached the walls the whole city was stirred with powerful excitement and alarm. "Who is this?" they asked, as they leaned out of the lattices and from the roofs, and stood aside in the bazaars and streets to let them pass; and the multitude answered, with something of pride in their great countryman—but already, as it were, with a shadow of distrust falling over their high Messianic

hopes, as they came in contact with the contempt and hostility of the capital—"This is Jesus, the Prophet of Nazareth."

The actual procession would not proceed farther than the foot of Mount Moriah (the *Har ha-beit*, Isa. ii. 2), beyond which they might not advance in travelling array, or with dusty feet. Before they had reached the Shushan gate of the Temple they dispersed, and Jesus entered. The Lord whom they sought had come suddenly to His Temple—even the messenger of the covenant; but they neither recognised Him, nor delighted in Him, though His first act was to purify and purge it, that they might offer to the Lord an offering in righteousness. As He looked round on all things His heart was again moved within Him to strong indignation. Three years before, at His first Passover, He had cleansed the Temple; but, alas! in vain. Already greed had won the battle against reverence; already the tessellated floors and pillared colonnades of the Court of the Gentiles had been again usurped by droves of oxen and sheep, and dove-sellers, and usurers, and its whole precincts were dirty with driven cattle, and echoed to the hum of bargaining voices and the clink of gold. In that desecrated place He would not teach. Once more, in mingled sorrow and anger, He drove them forth, while none dared to resist His burning zeal; nor would He even suffer the peaceful enclosure to be disturbed by people passing to and fro with vessels, and so turning it into a thoroughfare. The dense crowd of Jews—numbering, it is said, three millions—who crowded to the Holy City in the week of the feast, no doubt made the Court of the Gentiles a worse and busier scene on that day than at any other time, and the more so because on that day, according to the law, the Paschal lamb—which the visitors would be obliged to purchase—was chosen and set apart. But no considerations of their business and convenience could make it tolerable that they should turn His Father's house, which was a house of prayer for all nations, into a place most like one of those foul caves which He had seen so often in the Waddy Hammâm, where brigands wrangled over their ill-gotten spoils.

Not till He had reduced the Temple to decency and silence could He begin His customary ministrations. Doubtless the task was easier, because it had already been once performed. But when the miserable hubbub was over, then the Temple resumed what should have been its normal aspect. Sufferers came to Him, and He healed them. Listeners in hundreds thronged round him, were astonished at His doctrine, hung upon His lips. The very children of the Temple, in

their innocent delight, continued the glad Hosannas which had welcomed Him. The Chief Priests, and Scribes, and Pharisees, and leading people saw, and despised, and wondered, and perished. They could but gnash their teeth in their impotence, daring to do nothing, saying to each other that they *could* do nothing, for the whole world had gone after Him, yet hoping still that their hour would come, and the power of darkness. If they ventured to say one word to Him, they had to retire abashed and frustrated by His calm reply. They angrily called His attention to the cry of the boys in the Temple courts, and said, "Hearest thou what these say?" Perhaps they were boys employed in the musical services of the Temple, and if so the priestly party would be still more enraged. But Jesus calmly protected the children from their unconcealed hatred. "Yea," he answered, "have ye never read, Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings Thou hast perfected praise?"

So in high discourse, amid the vain attempts of His enemies to annoy and hinder Him, the hours of that memorable day passed by. And it was marked by one more deeply interesting incident. Struck by all they had seen and heard, some Greeks—probably Jewish proselytes attracted to Jerusalem by the feast—came to Philip, and asked him to procure for them a private interview with Jesus. Chaldæans from the East had sought His cradle; these Greeks from the West came to His cross. Who they were, and why they sought Him, we know not. An interesting tradition, but one on which unfortunately we can lay no stress, says that they were emissaries from Abgarus V., King of Edessa, who, having been made aware of the miracles of Jesus, and of the dangers to which He was now exposed, sent these emissaries to offer Him an asylum in his dominions. The legend adds that, though Jesus declined the offer, He rewarded the faith of Abgarus by writing him a letter, and healing him of a sickness.

St. John mentions nothing of these circumstances; he does not even tell us why these Greeks came to Philip in particular. As Bethsaida was the native town of this Apostle, and as many Jews at this period had adopted Gentile appellations, especially those which were current in the family of Herod, we cannot attach much importance to the Greek form of his name. It is an interesting indication of the personal awe which the Apostles felt for their Master, that Philip did not at once venture to grant their request. He went and consulted his fellow-townsmen Andrew, and the two Apostles then made known the wish of the Greeks to Jesus. Whether they actually introduced the

inquirers into His presence we cannot tell, but at any rate He saw in the incident a fresh sign that the hour was come when His name should be glorified. His answer was to the effect that as a grain of wheat must die before it can bring forth fruit, so the road to His glory lay through humiliation, and they who would follow Him must be prepared at all times to follow Him even to death. As He contemplated that approaching death, the human horror of it struggled with the ardour of His obedience; and conscious that to face that dread hour was to conquer it, He cried, "Father, glorify Thy name!" Then for the third time in His life came a voice from heaven, which said, "I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again." St. John frankly tells us that that Voice did not sound alike to all. The common multitude took it but for a passing peal of thunder; others said, "An Angel spake to him;" the Voice was articulate only to the few. But Jesus told them that the Voice was for their sakes, not for His; for the judgment of the world, its conviction of sin by the Holy Spirit, was now at hand, and the Prince of this world should be cast out. He should be lifted up, like the brazen serpent in the wilderness, and when so exalted He should draw all men unto Him. The people were perplexed at these dark allusions. They asked Him what could be the meaning of His saying that "the Son of Man should be lifted up?" If it meant violently taken away by a death of shame, how could this be? Was not the Son of Man a title of the Messiah? and did not the prophet imply that the reign of Messiah would be eternal? The true answer to their query could only be received by spiritual hearts—they were unprepared for it, and would only have been offended and shocked by it; therefore Jesus did not answer them. He only bade them walk in the light during the very little while that it should still remain with them, and so become the children of light. He was come as a light into the world, and the words which He spake should judge those who rejected Him; for those words—every brief answer, every long discourse—were from the Father; sunbeams from the Father of Lights; life-giving rays from the Life Eternal.

But all these glorious and healing truths were dull to blinded eyes, and dead to hardened hearts; and even the few of higher rank and wider culture who partially understood and partially believed them, yet dared not confess Him, because to confess Him was to incur the terrible *cherem* of the Sanhedrin; and this they would not face—loving the praise of men more than the praise of God.

Thus a certain sadness and sense of rejection fell even on the

evening of the Day of Triumph. It was not safe for Jesus to stay in the city, nor was it in accordance with His wishes. He retired secretly from the Temple, hid Himself from His watchful enemies, and, protected as yet outside the city walls by the enthusiasm of His Galilæan followers, "went out unto Bethany with the Twelve." But it is very probable that while He bent His steps in the direction of Bethany, He did not actually enter the village; for, on this occasion, His object seems to have been concealment, which would hardly have been secured by returning to the well-known house where so many had seen Him at the banquet on the previous evening. It is more likely that He sought shelter with His disciples under the olive-sprinkled slope of the hill, not far from the spot where the roads meet which lead to the little village. He was not unaccustomed to nights in the open air, and He and the Apostles, wrapped in their outer garments, could sleep soundly and peacefully on the green grass under the sheltering trees. The shadow of the traitor fell on Him and on that little band. Did *he* too sleep as calmly as the rest? Perhaps: for, as Mr. Froude says, "remorse may disturb the slumbers of a man who is dabbling with his first experiences of wrong; and when the pleasure has been tasted and is gone, and nothing is left of the crime but the ruin which it has wrought, then too the Furies take their seats upon the midnight pillow. *But the meridian of evil is, for the most part, left unvexed; and when a man has chosen his road, he is left alone to follow it to the end.*"

CHAPTER L.

MONDAY IN PASSION WEEK—A DAY OF PARABLES.

RISING from His bivouac in the neighbourhood of Bethany while it was still early, Jesus returned at once to the city and the Temple; and on His way He felt hungry. Monday and Thursday were kept by the scrupulous religionists of the day as voluntary fasts, and to this the Pharisee alludes when he says in the Parable, "I fast twice in the week." But this fasting was a mere "work of supererogation," neither commanded nor sanctioned by the Law or the Prophets, and it

was alien alike to the habits and precepts of One who came, not by external asceticisms, but with absolute self-surrender, to ennoble by Divine sinlessness the common life of men. It may be that in His compassionate eagerness to teach His people, He had neglected the common wants of life; it may be that there were no means of procuring food in the fields where He had spent the night; it may be again that the hour of prayer and morning sacrifice had not yet come, before which the Jews did not usually take a meal. But, whatever may have been the cause, Jesus hungered, so as to be driven to look for wayside fruit to sustain and refresh Him for the day's work. A few dates or figs, a piece of black bread, a draught of water, are sufficient at any time for an Oriental's simple meal.

There are trees in abundance even now throughout this region, but not the numerous palms, and figs, and walnut trees which made the vicinity of Jerusalem like one umbrageous park, before they were cut down by Titus, in the operations of the siege. Fig-trees especially were planted by the roadside, because the dust was thought to facilitate their growth, and their refreshing fruit was common property. At a distance in front of Him Jesus caught sight of a solitary fig-tree, and although the ordinary season at which figs ripened had not yet arrived, yet, as it was clad with verdure, and as the fruit of a fig sets before the leaves unfold, this tree looked more than usually promising. Its rich large leaves seemed to show that it was fruitful, and their unusually early growth that it was not only fruitful but precociously vigorous. There was every chance, therefore, of finding upon it either the late violet-coloured *kermouses*, or autumn figs, that often remained hanging on the trees all through the winter, and even until the new spring leaves had come; or the delicious *bakkooroth*, the first ripe on the fig-tree, of which Orientals are particularly fond. The difficulty raised about St. Mark's expression, that "the time of figs was not yet," is wholly needless. On the plains of Gennesareth Jesus must have been accustomed—if we may trust Josephus—to see the figs hanging ripe on the trees every month in the year excepting January and February; and there is to this day, in Palestine, a kind of white or early fig which ripens in spring, and much before the ordinary or black fig. On many grounds, therefore, Jesus might well have expected to find a few figs to satisfy the cravings of hunger on this fair-promising leafy tree, although the *ordinary* fig-season had not yet arrived.

But when He came up to it, He was disappointed. The sap was

circulating; the leaves made a fair show; but of fruit there was none. Fit emblem of a hypocrite, whose external semblance is a delusion and a sham—fit emblem of the nation in whom the ostentatious profession of religion brought forth no “fruit of good living”—the tree was barren. And it was *hopelessly* barren; for had it been fruitful the previous year, there would still have been some of the *ker-mouses* hidden under those broad leaves; and had it been fruitful *this* year, the *bakkooroth* would have set into green and delicious fragrance before the leaves appeared; but on this fruitless tree there was neither any promise for the future, nor any gleanings from the past.

And therefore, since it was but deceptive and useless, a barren cumberer of the ground, He made it the eternal warning against a life of hypocrisy continued until it is too late, and, in the hearing of His disciples, uttered upon it the solemn fiat, “Never fruit grow upon thee more!” Even at the word, such infructuous life as it possessed was arrested, and it began to wither away.

The criticisms upon this miracle have been singularly idle and singularly irreverent, because they have been based for the most part on ignorance or on prejudice. By those who reject the divinity of Jesus, it has been called a penal miracle, a miracle of vengeance, a miracle of unworthy anger, a childish exhibition of impatience under disappointment, an uncultured indignation against innocent Nature. No one, I suppose, who believes that the story represents a real and miraculous fact, will daringly arraign the motives of Him who performed it; but many argue that this is an untrue and mistaken story, because it narrates what they regard as an unworthy display of anger at a slight disappointment, and as a miracle of destruction which violated the rights of the supposed owner of the tree, or of the multitude. But, as to the first objection, surely it is enough to say that every page of the New Testament shows the *impossibility* of imagining that the Apostles and Evangelists had so poor and false a conception of Jesus as to believe that He avenged His passing displeasure on an irresponsible object. Would He who, at the Tempter’s bidding, refused to satisfy His wants by turning the stones of the wilderness into bread, be represented as having “flown into a rage”—no other expression is possible—with an unconscious tree? An absurdity so irreverent might have been found in the Apocryphal Gospels; but had the Evangelists been capable of penetrating it, then, most unquestionably, they could have had neither the capacity nor the desire to paint that Divine and

Eternal portrait of the Lord Jesus, which their knowledge of the truth, and the aid of God's Holy Spirit, enabled them to present to the world for ever, as its most priceless possession. And as for the withering of the tree, has the householder of the parable been ever severely censured because he said of his barren fig-tree, "Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?" Has St. John the Baptist been ever blamed for violence and destructiveness because he cried, "And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the tree: every tree, therefore, which bringeth not forth good fruit, is hewn down and cast into the fire?" Or has the ancient Prophet been charged with misrepresenting the character of God, when he says, "*I, the Lord, have dried up the green tree,*" as well as "*made the dry tree to flourish?*" When the hail beats down the tendrils of the vineyard—when the lightning scathes the olive, or "splits the unwedgeable and gnarled oak"—do any but the utterly ignorant and brutal begin at once to blaspheme against God? Is it a crime under *any* circumstances to destroy a *useless* tree? if not, is it *more* a crime to do so by miracle? Why, then, is the Saviour of the world—to whom Lebanon would be too little for a burnt-offering—to be blamed by petulant critics because He hastened the withering of one barren tree, and founded, on the destruction of its uselessness, three eternal lessons—a symbol of the destruction of impenitence, a warning of the peril of hypocrisy, an illustration of the power of faith?

They went on their way, and, as usual, entered the Temple; and scarcely had they entered it, when they were met by another indication of the intense incessant spirit of opposition which actuated the rulers of Jerusalem. A formidable deputation approached them, imposing alike in its numbers and its stateliness. The chief priests—heads of the twenty-four courses—the learned Scribes, the leading Rabbis, representatives of all the constituent classes of the Sanhedrin were there, to overawe Him—whom they despised as the poor ignorant Prophet of despicable Nazareth—with all that was venerable in age, eminent in wisdom, or imposing in authority in the great Council of the nation. The people whom He was engaged in teaching made reverent way for them, lest they should pollute those floating robes and ample fringes with a touch; and when they had arranged themselves around Jesus, they sternly and abruptly asked Him, "By what authority doest thou these things, and who gave thee this authority?" They demanded of Him His warrant for thus publicly assuming the functions of Rabbi and Prophet, for riding into Jerusalem amid the

hosannas of attendant crowds, for purging the Temple of the traffickers, at whose presence they connived?

The answer surprised and confounded them. With that infinite presence of mind, of which the world's history furnishes no parallel, and which remained calm under the worst assaults, Jesus told them that the answer to their question depended on the answer which they were prepared to give to *His* question. "The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or of men?" A sudden pause followed. "Answer me," said Jesus, interrupting their whispered colloquy. And surely they, who had sent a commission to inquire publicly into the claims of John, were in a position to answer. But no answer came. They knew full well the import of the question. They could not for a moment put it aside as irrelevant. John had openly and emphatically testified to Jesus, had acknowledged Him, before their own deputies, not only as a Prophet, but as a Prophet far greater than himself—nay, more, as *the* Prophet, the Messiah. Would they recognise that authority, or would they not? Clearly Jesus had a right to demand their reply to *that* question before He could reply to theirs. But they *could* not, or rather they *would* not answer that question. It reduced them in fact to a complete dilemma. They *would* not say "*from heaven,*" because they had in heart rejected it; they dared not say "*of men,*" because the belief in John (as we see even in Josephus) was so vehement and so unanimous that openly to reject him would have been to endanger their personal safety. They were reduced therefore—they, the masters of Israel—to the ignominious necessity of saying, "We cannot tell."

There is an admirable Hebrew proverb which says, "Teach thy tongue to say, 'I do not know.'" But to say "We do not know" in this instance, was a thing utterly alien to their habits, disgraceful to their discernment, a death-blow to their pretensions. It was ignorance in a sphere wherein ignorance was for them inexcusable. They, the appointed explainers of the Law—they, the accepted teachers of the people—they, the acknowledged monopolisers of Scriptural learning and oral tradition—and yet to be compelled, against their real convictions, to say, and that before the multitude, that they *could not tell* whether a man of immense and sacred influence—a man who acknowledged the Scriptures which they explained, and carried into practice the customs which they revered—was a divinely inspired messenger or a deluding impostor! Were the lines of demarcation, then, between the inspired Prophet (*nabî*) and the wicked seducer (*mesîth*) so dubious

and indistinct? It was indeed a fearful humiliation, and one which they never either forgot or forgave! And yet how just was the retribution which they had thus brought on their own heads! The curses which they had intended for another had recoiled upon themselves; the pompous question which was to be an engine wherewith another should be crushed, had sprung back with sudden rebound, to their own confusion and shame.

Jesus did not press upon their discomfiture—though He well knew—as the form of His answer showed—that their “*do not know*” was a “*do not choose to say*.” Since, however, their failure to answer clearly absolved Him from any necessity to tell them further of an authority about which, by their own confession, they were totally incompetent to decide, He ended the scene by simply saying, “Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things.”

So they retired a little into the background. He continued the instruction of the people which they had interrupted, and began once more to speak to them in parables, which both the multitude and the members of the Sanhedrin who were present could hardly fail to understand. And He expressly called their attention to what He was about to say. “*What think ye?*” He asked, for now it is their turn to submit to be questioned; and then, telling them of the two sons, of whom the one first flatly refused his father’s bidding, but afterwards repented and did it, the other blandly promised an obedience which he never performed, He asked, “Which of these two did his father’s will?” They could but answer “the first;” and He then pointed out to them the plain and solemn meaning of their own answer. It was, that the very publicans and harlots, despite the apparent open shamelessness of their disobedience, were yet showing *them*—them, the scrupulous and highly reputed legalists of the holy nation—the way into the kingdom of heaven. Yes, these sinners, whom they despised and hated, were streaming before them through the door which was not yet shut. For John had come to these Jews on their own principles and in their own practices, and they had pretended to receive him but had not; but the publicans and the harlots had repented at his bidding. For all their broad fringes and conspicuous phylacteries, they—the priests, the separatists, the Rabbis of these people—were *worse* in the sight of God than sinners whom they would have scorned to touch with one of their fingers.

Then He bade them “hear another parable,” the parable of the rebellious husbandmen in the vineyard, whose fruits they would not

yield. That vineyard of the Lord of Hosts was the house of Israel and the men of Judah were His pleasant plants; and they, the leaders and teachers, were those to whom the Lord of the vineyard would naturally look for the rendering of the produce. But in spite of all that He had done for His vineyard, there were no grapes, or only wild grapes. "He looked for judgment, but behold oppression; for righteousness, but behold a cry." And since they *could* not render any produce, and *dared* not own the barren fruitlessness, for which they, the husbandmen, were responsible, they insulted, and beat, and wounded, and slew messenger after messenger whom the lord of the vineyard sent to them. Last of all, He sent His Son, and that Son—though they recognised Him, and could not *but* recognise Him—they beat, and flung forth, and slew. When the Lord of the vineyard came, what would He do to them? Either the people, out of honest conviction, or the listening Pharisees, to show their apparent contempt for what they could not fail to see was the point of the parable, answered that He would wretchedly destroy those wretches, and let out the vineyard to worthier and more faithful husbandmen. A second time they had been compelled to an admission, which fatally, out of their own mouths, condemned themselves; they had confessed with their own lips that it would be in accordance with God's justice to deprive them of their exclusive rights, and to give them to the Gentiles.

And to show them that their own Scriptures had prophesied of this their conduct, He asked them whether they had never read (in the 118th Psalm) of the stone which the builders rejected, which nevertheless, by the marvellous purpose of God, became the headstone of the corner? How could they remain *builders* any longer, when the whole design of their workmanship was thus deliberately overruled and set aside? Did not their old Messianic prophecy clearly imply that God would call *other* builders to the work of His Temple? Woe to them who even stumbled—as they were doing—at that rejected stone; but even yet there was time for them to avoid the more crushing annihilation of those on whom that stone should fall. To reject Him in His humanity and humiliation involved pain and loss; but to be found still rejecting Him when He should come again in His glory, would not this be "utter destruction from the presence of the Lord?" To sit on the seat of judgment and condemn Him—*this* should be ruin to them and their nation; but to be condemned by Him, would not this be to be "ground to powder?"

They saw now, more clearly than ever, the whole bent and drift

of these parables, and longed for the hour of vengeance! But, as yet, fear restrained them; for, to the multitude, Christ was still a prophet.

One more warning utterance He spoke on this Day of Parables—the Parable of the Marriage of the King's Son. In its basis and framework it closely resembled the Parable of the Great Supper uttered, during His last journey, at a Pharisee's house; but in many of its details, and in its entire conclusion, it was different. Here the ungrateful subjects who receive the invitation, not only make light of it, and pursue undisturbed their worldly avocations, but some of them actually insult and murder the messengers who had invited them, and—a point at which the history merges into prophecy—are destroyed and their city burned. And the rest of the story points to yet further scenes, pregnant with still deeper meanings. Others are invited; the wedding feast is furnished with guests both bad and good; the king comes in, and notices one who had thrust himself into the company in his own rags, without providing or accepting the wedding garment, which the commonest courtesy required.

This rude, intruding, presumptuous guest is cast forth by attendant angels into outer darkness, where shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth; and then follows, for the last time, the warning urged in varying similitudes, with a frequency commensurate to its importance, that “many are called, but few are chosen.”

Teachings so obvious in their import filled the minds of the leading Priests and Pharisees with a more and more bitter rage. He had begun the day by refusing to answer their dictatorial questions, and by more than justifying that refusal. His counter-question had not only shown His calm superiority to the influence which they so haughtily exercised over the people, but had reduced them to the ignominious silence of an hypocrisy, which was forced to shield itself under the excuse of incompetence. Then followed His parables. In the first of these He had convicted them of false professions, unaccompanied by action; in the second, He had depicted the trust and responsibility of their office, and had indicated a terrible retribution for its cruel and profligate abuse; in the third, He had indicated alike the punishment which would ensue upon a violent rejection of His invitations, and the impossibility of deceiving the eye of His Heavenly Father by a mere nominal and pretended acceptance. Lying lip-service, faithless rebellion, blind presumption, such were the sins

which He had striven to bring home to their consciences. And this was but a superficial outline of all the heart-searching power with which His words had been to them like a sword of the Spirit, piercing even to the dividing of the joints and marrow. But to bad men nothing is so maddening as the exhibition of their own self-deception. So great was the hardly-concealed fury of the Jewish hierarchy, that they would gladly have seized Him that very hour. Fear restrained them, and He was suffered to retire unmolested to His quiet resting-place. But, either that night or early on the following morning, His enemies held another council—at this time they seem to have held them almost daily—to see if they could not make one more combined, systematic, overwhelming effort “to entangle Him in His talk,” to convict Him of ignorance or of error, to shake His credit with the multitude, or embroil Him in dangerous relations towards the civil authority. We shall see in the following chapter the result of their machinations.

CHAPTER LI.

THE DAY OF TEMPTATIONS—THE LAST AND GREATEST DAY OF THE PUBLIC MINISTRY OF JESUS.

ON the following morning Jesus rose with His disciples to enter for the last time the Temple Courts. On their way they passed the solitary fig-tree, no longer gay with its false leafy garniture, but shrivelled, from the root upwards, in every bough. The quick eye of Peter was the first to notice it, and he exclaimed, “Master, behold the fig-tree which thou cursedst is withered away.” The disciples stopped to look at it, and to express their astonishment at the rapidity with which the denunciation had been fulfilled. What struck them most was the *power* of Jesus; the deeper meanings of His symbolic act they seem for the time to have missed; and, leaving these lessons to dawn upon them gradually, Jesus addressed the mood of their minds at the moment, and told them that if they would but have faith in God—faith which should enable them to offer up their prayers with perfect and unwavering confidence—they should not