

fact—however we may choose to interpret such a fact—synchronised in a remarkable manner with great events in human history. It would not, therefore, imply any prodigious folly on the part of the Magi to regard the planetary conjunction as something providentially significant. And if astrology be ever so absurd, yet there is nothing absurd in the supposition that the Magi should be led to truth, even through the gateways of delusion, if the spirit of sincerity and truth was in them. The history of science will furnish repeated instances, not only of the invaluable discoveries accorded to apparent accident, but even of the immense results achieved in the investigation of innocent and honest error. Saul, who in seeking asses found a kingdom, is but a type of many another seeker in many another age.

The Magi came to Bethlehem, and offered to the young child in his rude and humble resting-place a reverence which we do not hear that they had paid to the usurping Edomite in his glittering palace. “And when they had opened their treasures they presented unto him gifts, gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.” The imagination of early Christians has seen in each gift a special significance: myrrh for the human nature, gold to the king, frankincense to the divinity; or, the gold for the race of Shem, the myrrh for the race of Ham, the incense for the race of Japheth;—innocent fancies, only worthy of mention because of their historic interest, and their bearing on the conceptions of Christian poetry and Christian art.

LESSON THREE

CHAPTER IV.

THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT, AND THE MASSACRE OF THE INNOCENTS.

WHEN they had offered their gifts, the Wise Men would naturally have returned to Herod, but being warned of God in a dream, they returned to their own land another way. Neither in Scripture, nor in authentic history, nor even in early apocryphal tradition, do we find any further traces of their existence; but their visit led to very memorable events.

The dream which warned them of danger may very probably have fallen in with their own doubts about the cruel and crafty tyrant who had expressed a hypocritical desire to pay his homage to the Infant

King; and if, as we may suppose, they imparted to Joseph any hint as to their misgivings, he too would be prepared for the warning dream which bade him fly to Egypt to save the young child from Herod's jealousy.

Egypt has, in all ages, been the natural place of refuge for all who were driven from Palestine by distress, persecution, or discontent. Rhinokolura, the wady or river of Egypt, which Milton, with his usual exquisite and learned accuracy, calls

“The brook that parts
Egypt from Syrian ground,”

might have been reached by the fugitives in three days; and once upon the further bank, they were beyond the reach of Herod's jurisdiction.

Of the flight, and its duration, Scripture gives us no further particulars; telling us only that the Holy Family fled by night from Bethlehem, and returned when Joseph had again been assured by a dream that it would be safe to take back the Saviour to the land of His nativity. It is left to apocryphal legends, immortalised by the genius of Italian art, to tell us how, on the way, the dragons came and bowed to Him, the lions and leopards adored Him, the roses of Jericho blossomed wherever His footsteps trod, the palm-trees at His command bent down to give them dates, the robbers were overawed by His majesty, and the journey was miraculously shortened. They tell us further how, at His entrance into the country, all the idols of the land of Egypt fell from their pedestals with a sudden crash, and lay shattered and broken upon their faces, and how many wonderful cures of leprosy and demoniac possession were wrought by His word. All this wealth and prodigality of superfluous, aimless, and unmeaning miracle—arising in part from a mere craving for the supernatural, and in part from a fanciful application of Old Testament prophecies—furnishes a strong contrast to the truthful simplicity of the Gospel narrative. St. Matthew neither tells us where the Holy Family abode in Egypt, nor how long their exile continued; but ancient legends say that they remained two years absent from Palestine, and lived at Matarééh, a few miles north-east of Cairo, where a fountain was long shown of which Jesus had made the water fresh, and an ancient sycamore under which they had rested. The Evangelist alludes only to the causes of their flight and of their return, and finds in the latter a new and deeper significance for the words of the prophet Hosea, “Out of Egypt have I called my Son.”

The flight into Egypt led to a very memorable event. Seeing that the Wise Men had not returned to him, the alarm and jealousy of Herod assumed a still darker and more malignant aspect. He had no means of identifying the royal infant of the seed of David, and least of all would he have been likely to seek for Him in the cavern stable of the village khan. But he knew that the child whom the visit of the Magi had taught him to regard as a future rival of himself or of his house was yet an infant at the breast; and as Eastern mothers usually suckle their children for two years, he issued his fell mandate to slay all the children of Bethlehem and its neighbourhood "from two years old and under." Of the method by which the decree was carried out we know nothing. The children may have been slain secretly, gradually, and by various forms of murder; or, as has been generally supposed, there may have been one single hour of dreadful butchery. The decrees of tyrants like Herod are usually involved in a deadly obscurity; they reduce the world to a torpor in which it is hardly safe to speak above a whisper. But the wild wail of anguish which rose from the mothers thus cruelly robbed of their infant children could not be hushed, and they who heard it might well imagine that Rachel, the great ancestress of their race, whose tomb stands by the roadside about a mile from Bethlehem, once more, as in the pathetic image of the prophet, mingled her voice with the mourning and lamentation of those who wept so inconsolably for their murdered little ones.

To us there seems something inconceivable in a crime so atrocious; but our thoughts have been softened by eighteen centuries of Christianity, and such deeds are by no means unparalleled in the history of heathen despots and of the ancient world. Infanticide of a deeper dye than this of Herod's was a crime dreadfully rife in the days of the Empire; and the Massacre of the Innocents, as well as the motives which led to it, can be illustrated by several circumstances in the history of this very epoch. Suetonius, in his *Life of Augustus*, quotes from the life of the Emperor by his freedman Julius Marathus, a story to the effect that shortly before his birth there was a prophecy in Rome that a king over the Roman people would soon be born. To obviate this danger to the Republic, the Senate ordered that all the male children born in that year should be abandoned or exposed; but the Senators whose wives were pregnant took means to prevent the ratification of the statute, because each of them hoped that the prophecy might refer to his own child. Again, Eusebius quotes from Hegesippus,

a Jew by birth, a story that Domitian, alarmed by the growing power of the name of Christ, issued an order to destroy all the descendants of the house of David. Two grandchildren of St. Jude—"the Lord's brother"—were still living, and were known as the *Desposyni*. They were betrayed to the Emperor by a certain Jocatus, and other Nazaræan heretics, and were brought into the imperial presence; but when Domitian observed that they only held the rank of peasants, and that their hands were hard with manual toil, he dismissed them in safety with a mixture of pity and contempt.

Although doubts have been thrown on the Massacre of the Innocents, it is profoundly in accordance with all that we know of Herod's character. The master-passions of that able but wicked prince were a most unbounded ambition, and a most excruciating jealousy. His whole career was red with the blood of murder. He had massacred priests and nobles; he had decimated the Sanhedrin; he had caused the High Priest, his brother-in-law, the young and noble Aristobulus, to be drowned in pretended sport before his eyes; he had ordered the strangulation of his favourite wife, the beautiful Asmonæan princess Mariamne, though she seems to have been the only human being whom he passionately loved. His sons Alexander, Aristobulus, and Antipater—his uncle Joseph—Antigonus and Alexander, the uncle and father of his wife—his mother-in-law Alexandra—his kinsman Cortobanus—his friends Dositheus and Gadias, were but a few of the multitudes who fell victims to his sanguinary, suspicious, and guilty terrors. His brother Pheroras and his son Archelaus barely and narrowly escaped execution by his orders. Neither the blooming youth of the prince Aristobulus, nor the white hairs of the king Hyrcanus, had protected them from his fawning and treacherous fury. Deaths by strangulation, deaths by burning, deaths by being cleft asunder, deaths by secret assassination, confessions forced by unutterable torture, acts of insolent and inhuman lust, mark the annals of a reign which was so cruel that, in the energetic language of the Jewish ambassadors to the Emperor Augustus, "the survivors during his lifetime were even more miserable than the sufferers." And as in the case of Henry VIII., every dark and brutal instinct of his character seemed to acquire fresh intensity as his life drew towards its close. Haunted by the spectres of his murdered wife and murdered sons, agitated by the conflicting furies of remorse and blood, the pitiless monster, as Josephus call him, was seized in his last days by a black and bitter ferocity, which broke out against all with whom he came in

contact. There is no conceivable difficulty in supposing that such a man—a savage barbarian with a thin veneer of corrupt and superficial civilisation—would have acted in the exact manner which St. Matthew describes; and the belief in the fact receives independent confirmation from various sources. “On Augustus being informed,” says Macrobius, “that *among the boys under two years of age whom Herod ordered to be slain in Syria*, his own son also had been slain,” “It is better,” said he, “to be Herod’s pig (*ἔν*) than his son (*υἷον*).” Although Macrobius is a late writer, and made the mistake of supposing that Herod’s son Antipater, who was put to death about the same time as the Massacre of the Innocents, had actually perished *in* that massacre, it is clear that the form in which he narrates the *bon mot* of Augustus, points to some dim reminiscence of this cruel slaughter.

Why then, it has been asked, does Josephus make no mention of so infamous an atrocity? Perhaps because it was performed so secretly that he did not even know of it. Perhaps because, in those terrible days, the murder of a score of children, in consequence of a transient suspicion, would have been regarded as an item utterly insignificant in the list of Herod’s murders. Perhaps because it was passed over in silence by Nikolaus of Damascus, who, writing in the true spirit of those Hellenising courtiers, who wanted to make a political Messiah out of a corrupt and blood-stained usurper, magnified all his patron’s achievements, and concealed or palliated all his crimes. But the more probable reason is that Josephus, whom, in spite of all the immense literary debt which we owe to him, we can only regard as a renegade and a sycophant, did not choose to make any allusion to facts which were even remotely connected with the life of Christ. The single passage in which he alludes to Him is interpolated, if not wholly spurious, and no one can doubt that his silence on the subject of Christianity was as deliberate as it was dishonest.

But although Josephus does not distinctly mention the event, yet every single circumstance which he does tell us about this period of Herod’s life supports its probability. At this very time two eloquent Jewish teachers, Judas and Matthias, had incited their scholars to pull down the large golden eagle which Herod had placed above the great gate of the Temple. Josephus connects this bold attempt with premature rumours of Herod’s death; but Lardner’s conjecture that it may have been further encouraged by the Messianic hopes freshly kindled by the visit of the Wise Men, is by no means impossible. The attempt, however, was defeated, and Judas and Matthias, with forty of their

scholars, were burned alive. With such crimes as this before him on every page, Josephus might well have ignored the secret assassination of a few unweaned infants in a little village. Their blood was but a drop of that crimson river in which Herod was steeped to the very lips.

It must have been very shortly after the murder of the Innocents that Herod died. Only five days before his death he had made a frantic attempt at suicide, and had ordered the execution of his eldest son Antipater. His death-bed, which once more reminds us of Henry VIII., was accompanied by circumstances of peculiar horror, and it has been noticed that the loathsome disease of which he died is hardly mentioned in history, except in the case of men who have been rendered infamous by an atrocity of persecuting zeal. On his bed of intolerable anguish, in that splendid and luxurious palace which he had built for himself under the palms of Jericho, swollen with disease and scorched by thirst—ulcerated externally and glowing inwardly with a “soft slow fire”—surrounded by plotting sons and plundering slaves, detesting all and detested by all—longing for death as a release from his tortures, yet dreading it as the beginning of worse terrors—stung by remorse, yet still unslaked with murder—a horror to all around him, yet in his guilty conscience a worse terror to himself—devoured by the premature corruption of an anticipated grave—eaten of worms as though visibly smitten by the finger of God’s wrath, after seventy years of successful villany—the wretched old man, whom men had called the Great, lay in savage frenzy awaiting his last hour. As he knew that none would shed one tear for *him*, he determined that they should shed many for *themselves*, and issued an order that, under pain of death, the principal families in the kingdom and the chiefs of the tribes should come to Jericho. They came, and then, shutting them in the hippodrome, he secretly commanded his sister Salome that at the moment of his death they should all be massacred. And so, choking as it were with blood, devising massacres in its very delirium, the soul of Herod passed forth into the night.

In purple robes, with crown and sceptre and precious stones, the corpse was placed upon its splendid bier, and accompanied with military pomp and burning incense to its grave in the Herodium, not far from the place where Christ was born. But the spell of the Herodian dominion was broken, and the people saw how illusory had been its glittering fascination. The day of Herod’s death was, as he had foreseen, observed as a festival. His will was disputed; his kingdom disintegrated; his last order was disobeyed; his sons died for the most part in infamy and

exile ; the curse of God was on his house, and though, by ten wives and many concubines, he seems to have had nine sons and five daughters, yet within a hundred years the family of the *hierodoulos* of Ascalon had perished by disease or violence, and there was no living descendant to perpetuate his name.

If the intimation of Herod's death was speedily given to Joseph, the stay in Egypt must have been too short to influence in any way the human development of our Lord. This may perhaps be the reason why St. Luke passes it over in silence.

It seems to have been the first intention of Joseph to fix his home in Bethlehem. It was the city of his ancestors, and was hallowed by many beautiful and heroic associations. It would have been easy to find a living there by a trade which must almost anywhere have supplied the simple wants of a peasant family. It is true that an Oriental rarely leaves his home, but when he has been compelled by circumstances to do so, he finds it comparatively easy to settle elsewhere. Having once been summoned to Bethlehem, Joseph might find a powerful attraction in the vicinity of the little town to Jerusalem ; and the more so since it had recently been the scene of such memorable circumstances. But, on his way, he was met by the news that Archelaus ruled in the room of his father Herod. The people would only too gladly have got rid of the whole Idumæan race : at the worst they would have preferred Antipas to Archelaus. But Augustus had unexpectedly decided in favour of Archelaus, who, though younger than Antipas, was the heir nominated by the last will of his father ; and, as though anxious to show that he was the true son of that father, Archelaus, even before his inheritance had been confirmed by Roman authority, "had," as Josephus scornfully remarks, "given to his subjects a specimen of his future virtue, by ordering a slaughter of 3,000 of his own countrymen at the Temple." It was clear that under such a government there could be neither hope nor safety ; and Joseph, obedient once more to an intimation of God's will, seeking once more the original home of himself and Mary, "turned aside into the parts of Galilee," where, in remote obscurity, sheltered by poverty and insignificance, the Holy Family might live secure under the sway of another son of Herod—the equally unscrupulous, but more indolent and indifferent Antipas.

CHAPTER V.

THE BOYHOOD OF JESUS.

THE physical geography of Palestine is, perhaps, more distinctly marked than that of any other country in the world. Along the shore of the Mediterranean runs the Shephelah and the maritime plain, broken only by the bold spur of Mount Carmel; parallel to this is a long range of hills for the most part rounded and featureless in their character; these, on their eastern side, plunge into the deep declivity of El Ghôr, the Jordan valley; and beyond the Jordan valley runs the straight, unbroken, purple line of the mountains of Moab and Gilead. Thus the character of the country from north to south may be represented by four parallel bands—the Sea-board, the Hill country, the Jordan valley, and the Trans-Jordanic range.

The Hill country, which thus occupies the space between the low maritime plain and the deep Jordan valley, falls into two great masses, the continuity of the low mountain-range being broken by the plain of Jezreel. The southern mass of those limestone hills formed the land of Judea; the northern, the land of Galilee.

Gâlîl, in Hebrew, means “a circle,” and the name was originally applied to the twenty cities in the circuit of Kedesh-Naphtali, which Solomon gave to Hiram in return for his services in transporting timber, and to which Hiram, in extreme disgust, applied the name of *Cabûl*, or “disgusting.” Thus it seems to have been always the destiny of Galilee to be despised; and that contempt was likely to be fostered in the minds of the Jews from the fact that this district became, from very early days, the residence of a mixed population, and was distinguished as “Galilee of the Gentiles.” Not only were there many Phœnicians and Arabs in the cities of Galilee, but, in the time of our Lord, there were also many Greeks, and the Greek language was currently spoken and understood.

The hills which form the northern limit of the plain of Jezreel run almost due east and west from the Jordan valley to the Mediterranean, and their southern slopes were in the district assigned to the tribe of Zebulun.

Almost in the centre of this chain of hills there is a singular cleft in the limestone, forming the entrance to a little valley. As the traveller leaves the plain he will ride up a steep and narrow pathway, brodered with grass and flowers, through scenery which is neither

colossal nor overwhelming, but infinitely beautiful and picturesque. Beneath him, on the right hand side, the vale will gradually widen, until it becomes about a quarter of a mile in breadth. The basin of the valley is divided by hedges of cactus into little fields and gardens, which, about the fall of the spring rains, wear an aspect of indescribable calm, and glow with a tint of the richest green. Beside the narrow pathway, at no great distance apart from each other, are two wells, and the women who draw water there are more beautiful, and the ruddy, bright-eyed shepherd-boys who sit or play by the well sides, in their gay-coloured Oriental costume, are a happier, bolder, brighter-looking race than the traveller will have seen elsewhere. Gradually the valley opens into a little natural amphitheatre of hills, supposed by some to be the crater of an extinct volcano; and there, clinging to the hollows of a hill, which rises to the height of some five hundred feet above it, lie, "like a handful of pearls in a goblet of emerald," the flat roofs and narrow streets of a little Eastern town. There is a small church; the massive buildings of a convent; the tall minaret of a mosque; a clear, abundant fountain; houses built of white stone, and gardens scattered among them, umbrageous with figs and olives, and rich with the white and scarlet blossoms of orange and pomegranate. In spring, at least, everything about the place looks indescribably bright and soft; doves murmur in the trees; the hoopoe flits about in ceaseless activity; the bright blue roller-bird, the commonest and loveliest bird of Palestine, flashes like a living sapphire over fields which are enamelled with innumerable flowers. And that little town is *En Nâzirah*, Nazareth, where the Son of God, the Saviour of mankind, spent nearly thirty years of His mortal life. It was, in fact, His home, His native village for all but three or four years of His life on earth: the village which lent its then ignominious name to the scornful title written upon His cross; the village from which He did not disdain to draw His appellation when He spake in vision to the persecuting Saul. And along the narrow mountain-path which I have described, His feet must have often trod, for it is the only approach by which, in returning northwards from Jerusalem, He could have reached the home of His infancy, youth, and manhood.

What was His manner of life during those thirty years! It is a question which the Christian cannot help asking in deep reverence, and with yearning love; but the words in which the Gospels answer it are very calm and very few.

Of the four Evangelists, St. John the beloved disciple, and St. Mark the friend and "son" of St. Peter, pass over these thirty years in absolute, unbroken silence. St. Matthew devotes one chapter to the visit of the Magi and the flight into Egypt, and then proceeds to the preaching of the Baptist. St. Luke alone, after describing the incidents which marked the presentation in the Temple, preserves for us one inestimable anecdote of the Saviour's boyhood, and one inestimable verse descriptive of His growth till He was twelve years old. And that verse contains nothing for the gratification of our curiosity; it furnishes us with no details of life, no incidents of adventure; it tells us only how, in a sweet and holy childhood, "the child grew and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon Him." To this period of His life, too, we may apply the subsequent verse, "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man." His development was a strictly human development. He did not come into the world endowed with infinite knowledge, but, as St. Luke tells us, "He gradually advanced in wisdom." He was not clothed with infinite power, but experienced the weaknesses and imperfections of human infancy. He grew as other children grow, only in a childhood of stainless and sinless beauty—"as the flower of roses in the spring of the year, and as lilies by the waters."

There is, then, for the most part a deep silence in the Evangelists respecting this period; but what eloquence in their silence! May we not find in their very reticence a wisdom and an instruction more profound than if they had filled many volumes with minor details?

In the first place, we may see in this their silence a signal and striking confirmation of their faithfulness. We may learn from it that they desired to tell the simple truth, and not to construct an astonishing or plausible narrative. That Christ should have passed thirty years of His brief life in the deep obscurity of a provincial village; that He should have been brought up not only in a conquered land, but in its most despised province; not only in a despised province, but in its most disregarded valley; that during all those thirty years the ineffable brightness of His divine nature should have tabernacled among us, "in a tent like ours, and of the same material," unnoticed and unknown; that during those long years there should have been no flash of splendid circumstance, no outburst of amazing miracle, no "sevenfold chorus of hallelujahs and harping symphonies" to announce, and reveal, and glorify the coming King: this is not what we should

have expected—not what *any one* would have been likely to imagine or to invent.

We should not have expected it, but it *was* so; and therefore the Evangelists leave it so; and the very fact of its contradicting all that we should have imagined is an additional proof that so it must have been. An additional proof, because the Evangelists must inevitably have been—as, indeed, we know that they *were*—actuated by the same *à priori* anticipations as ourselves; and had there been any glorious circumstances attending the boyhood of our Lord, they, as honest witnesses, would certainly have told us of them; and had they *not* been honest witnesses, they would—if none such occurred in reality—have most certainly invented them. But man's ways are not as God's ways; and because the truth which by their very silence the Evangelists record is a revelation to us of the ways of God, and not of man, therefore it contradicts what we should have invented; it disappoints what, without further enlightenment, we should have desired. But, on the other hand, it fulfils the ideal of ancient prophecy, "He shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground;" and it is in accordance with subsequent allusion, "He made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant."

We have only to turn to the Apocryphal Gospels, and we shall find how widely different is the false human ideal from the divine fact. There we shall see how, following their natural and unspiritual bent, the fabulists of Christendom, whether heretical or orthodox, surround Christ's boyhood with a blaze of miracle, make it portentous, terror-striking, unnatural, repulsive. It is surely an astonishing proof that the Evangelists were guided by the Spirit of God in telling how *He* lived in whom God was revealed to man, when we gradually discover that no profane, no irreverent, even no imaginative hand can touch the sacred outlines of that divine and perfect picture without degrading and distorting it. Whether the Apocryphal writers meant their legends to be accepted as history or as fiction, it is at least certain that in most cases they meant to weave around the brows of Christ a garland of honour. Yet how do their stories dwarf, and dishonour, and misinterpret Him! How infinitely superior is the noble simplicity of that evangelic silence to all the theatrical displays of childish and meaningless omnipotence with which the Protevangelium, and the Pseudo-Matthew, and the Arabic Gospel of the Infancy are full! They meant to honour Christ; but no invention *can* honour Him; he who invents about Him degrades Him; he mixes the weak, im-

perfect, erring fancies of man with the unapproachable and awful purposes of God. The boy Christ of the Gospel is simple and sweet, obedient and humble; He is subject to His parents; He is occupied solely with the quiet duties of His home and of His age; He loves all men, and all men love the pure, and gracious, and noble child. Already He knows God as His father, and the favour of God falls on Him softly as the morning sun-light or the dew of heaven, and plays like an invisible aureole around His brow. Unseen, save in the beauty of heaven, but yet covered with silver wings, and with its feathers like gold, the Spirit of God descended like a dove, and rested from infancy upon the Holy Child.

But how different is the boy Christ of the New Testament Apocrypha! He is mischievous, petulant, forward, revengeful. Some of the marvels told of Him are simply aimless and puerile—as when He carries the spilt water in His robe; or pulls the short board to the requisite length; or moulds sparrows of clay, and then claps His hand to make them fly; or throws all the cloths into the dyer's vat, and then draws them out each stained of the requisite colour. But some are, on the contrary, simply distasteful and inconsiderate—as when He vexes and shames and silences those who wish to teach Him; or rebukes Joseph; or turns His playmates into kids: and others are simply cruel and blasphemous—as when He strikes dead with a curse the boys who offend or run against Him, until at last there is a storm of popular indignation, and Mary is afraid to let Him leave the house. In a careful search through all these heavy, tasteless, and frequently pernicious fictions, I can find but one anecdote in which there is a touch of feeling or possibility of truth; and this alone I will quote, because it is at any rate harmless, and it is quite conceivable that it may rest upon some slight basis of traditional fact. It is from the Arabic Gospel of the Infancy, and runs as follows:—

“Now in the month of Adar, Jesus assembled the boys as if He were their king; they strewed their garments on the ground, and He sat upon them. Then they put on His head a crown wreathed of flowers, and, like attendants waiting upon a king, they stood in order before Him on His right hand and on His left. And whoever passed that way the boys took him by force, crying, ‘Come hither and adore the King, and then proceed upon thy way.’”

Yet I am not sure that the sacredness of the evangelic silence is not rudely impaired even by so simple a fancy as this: for it was in utter stillness, in prayerfulness, in the quiet round of daily duties—

like Moses in the wilderness, like David among the sheep-folds, like Elijah among the tents of the Bedawin, like Jeremiah in his quiet home at Anathoth, like Amos in the sycamore groves of Tekoa—that the boy Jesus prepared Himself, amid a hallowed obscurity, for His mighty work on earth. His outward life was the life of all those of His age, and station, and place of birth. He lived as lived the other children of peasant parents in that quiet town, and in great measure as they live now. He who has seen the children of Nazareth in their red caftans, and bright tunics of silk or cloth, girded with a many-coloured sash, and sometimes covered with a loose outer jacket of white or blue—he who has watched their noisy and merry games, and heard their ringing laughter as they wander about the hills of their little native vale, or play in bands on the hill-side beside their sweet and abundant fountain, may perhaps form some conception of how Jesus looked and played when He too was a child. And the traveller who has followed any of those children—as I have done—to their simple homes, and seen the scanty furniture, the plain but sweet and wholesome food, the uneventful, happy, patriarchal life, may form a vivid conception of the manner in which Jesus lived. Nothing can be plainer than those houses, with the doves sunning themselves on the white roofs, and the vines wreathing about them. The mats, or carpets, are laid loose along the walls; shoes and sandals are taken off at the threshold; from the centre hangs a lamp which forms the only ornament of the room; in some recess in the wall is placed the wooden chest, painted with bright colours, which contains the books or other possessions of the family; on a ledge that runs round the wall, within easy reach, are neatly rolled up the gay-coloured quilts, which serve as beds, and on the same ledge are ranged the earthen vessels for daily use; near the door stand the large common water-jars of red clay with a few twigs and green leaves—often of aromatic shrubs—thrust into their orifices to keep the water cool. At meal-time a painted wooden stool is placed in the centre of the apartment, a large tray is put upon it, and in the middle of the tray stands the dish of rice and meat, or *libban*, or stewed fruits, from which all help themselves in common. Both before and after the meal the servant, or the youngest member of the family, pours water over the hands from a brazen ewer into a brazen bowl. So quiet, so simple, so humble, so uneventful was the outward life of the family of Nazareth.

The reverent devotion and brilliant fancy of the early mediæval painters have elaborated a very different picture. The gorgeous

pencils of a Giotto and a Fra Angelico have painted the Virgin and her Child seated on stately thrones, upon floors of splendid mosaic, under canopies of blue and gold; they have robed them in colours rich as the hues of summer or delicate as the flowers of spring, and fitted the edges of their robes with golden embroidery, and clasped them with priceless gems. Far different was the reality. When Joseph returned to Nazareth he knew well that they were going into seclusion as well as into safety; and that the life of the Virgin and the Holy Child would be spent, not in the full light of notoriety or wealth, but in secrecy, in poverty, and in manual toil.

Yet this poverty was not pauperism; there was nothing in it either miserable or abject; it was sweet, simple, contented, happy, even joyous. Mary, like others of her rank, would spin, and cook food, and go to buy fruit, and evening by evening visit the fountain, still called after her "the Virgin's fountain," with her pitcher of earthenware carried on her shoulder or her head. Jesus would play, and learn, and help His parents in their daily tasks, and visit the synagogues on the Sabbath days. "It is written," says Luther, "that there was once a pious godly bishop, who had often earnestly prayed that God would manifest to him what Jesus had done in His youth. Once the bishop had a dream to this effect. He seemed in his sleep to see a carpenter working at his trade, and beside him a little boy who was gathering up chips. Then came in a maiden clothed in green, who called them both to come to the meal, and set porridge before them. All this the bishop seemed to see in his dream, himself standing behind the door that he might not be perceived. Then the little boy began and said, 'Why does that man stand there? shall he not also eat with us?' And this so frightened the bishop that he awoke." "Let this be what it may," adds Luther, "a true history or a fable, I none the less believe that Christ in His childhood and youth looked and acted like other children yet without sin, in fashion like a man."

St. Matthew tells us, that in the settlement of the Holy Family at Nazareth, was fulfilled that which was spoken by the prophets, "He shall be called a Nazarene." It is well known that no such passage occurs in any extant prophecy. If the name implied a contemptuous dislike—as may be inferred from the proverbial question of Nathanael, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?"—then St. Matthew may be summing up in that expression the various prophecies so little understood by his nation, which pointed to the Messiah as a man of sorrows. And certainly to this day "Nazarene" has continued to be a term of

contempt. The Talmudists always speak of Jesus as "Ha-notseri;" Julian is said to have expressly decreed that Christians should be called by the less honourable appellation of Galilæans; and to this day the Christians of Palestine are known by no other title than Nusâra. But the explanation which refers St. Matthew's allusion to those passages of prophecy in which Christ is called "the Branch" (*nêtser*, נֶטְסֵר) seems far more probable. The village may have derived this name from no other circumstance than its abundant foliage; but the Old Testament is full of proofs that the Hebrews—who in philology accepted the views of the Analogists—attached immense and mystical importance to mere resemblances in the sound of words. To mention but one single instance, the first chapter of the prophet Micah turns almost entirely on such merely external similarities in what, for lack of a better term, I can only call the physiological quantity of sounds. St. Matthew, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, would without any hesitation have seen a prophetic fitness in Christ's residence at this town of Galilee, because its name recalled the title by which He was addressed in the prophecy of Isaiah.

"Shall the Christ come out of Galilee?" asked the wondering people. "Search and look!" said the Rabbis to Nicodemus, "for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet" (John vii. 41, 52). It would not have needed very deep searching or looking to find that these words were ignorant or false; for not to speak of Barak the deliverer, and Elon the judge, and Anna the prophetess, three, if not four of the prophets—and those prophets of the highest eminence, Jonah, Elijah, Hosea, and Nahum—had been born, or had exercised much of their ministry, in the precincts of Galilee. And in spite of the supercilious contempt with which it was regarded, the little town of Nazareth, situated as it was in a healthy and secluded valley, yet close upon the confines of great nations, and in the centre of a mixed population, was eminently fitted to be the home of our Saviour's childhood, the scene of that quiet growth "in wisdom, and stature, and favour with God and man."

Stop here and take Lesson Three Test.

CHAPTER VI.

JESUS IN THE TEMPLE.

EVEN as there is one hemisphere of the lunar surface, on which, in its entirety, no human eye has ever gazed, while at the same time the moon's librations enable us to conjecture of its general character and