

## LESSON NINE

## CHAPTER XVI.

## REJECTED BY THE NAZARENES.

UP to this point of the sacred narrative we have followed the chronological guidance of St. John, and here, for the first time, we are seriously met by the difficult question as to the true order of events in our Lord's ministry.

Is it or is it not possible to construct a harmony of the Gospels which shall remove all the difficulties created by the differing order in which the Evangelists narrate the same events, and by the confessedly fragmentary character of their records, and by the general vagueness of the notes of time which they give, even when such notes are not wholly absent?

It is, perhaps, a sufficient answer to this question that scarcely any two authorities agree in the schemes which have been elaborated for the purpose. A host of writers, in all Christian nations, have devoted years—some of them have devoted well-nigh their whole lives—to the consideration of this and of similar questions, and have yet failed to come to any agreement or to command any general consent.

To enter into all the arguments, on both sides, about the numerous disputed points which must be settled before the problem can be solved, would be to undertake a task which would fill many volumes, would produce no final settlement of the difficulty, and would be wholly beyond the purpose before us. What I have done is carefully to consider the chief *data*, and without entering into controversy or pretending to remove all possible objections, to narrate the events in that order which, after repeated study, seems to be the most intrinsically probable, with due reference to all *definite* indications of time which the Gospels contain. An indisputable or convincing harmony of the Gospels appears to me to be impossible, and as a necessary consequence it can be of no absolute importance. Had it been essential to our comprehension of the Saviour's life that we should know more exactly the times and places where the years of His public ministry were spent, the Christian at least will believe that such knowledge would not have been withheld from us.

The inspiration which guided the Evangelists in narrating the life of Christ was one which enabled them to tell all that was necessary for the peace and well-being of our souls, but very far from all which we might have yearned to know for the gratification of our curiosity,

or even the satisfaction of our historic interest. Nor is it difficult to see herein a fresh indication that our thoughts must be fixed on the spiritual more than on the material—on Christ who liveth for evermore, and is with us always, even to the end of the world, far more than on the external incidents of that human life which, in the council of God's will, was the appointed means of man's redemption. We shall never know all that we could wish to know about

“The sinless years  
That breathed beneath the Syrian blue,”

but we shall still be the children of God, and the disciples of His Christ, if we keep His sayings and do the things which He commanded.

St. John tells us that after two days' abode among the open-minded Samaritans of Sychar, Jesus went into Galilee, “*for* He himself testified that a prophet hath no honour in his own country,” and yet he continues, that, “When He was come into Galilee, the Galilæans received Him, having seen all the things that He did at Jerusalem at the feast;” and he adds, immediately afterwards, that Jesus came again into Cana of Galilee, and there healed the nobleman's son. The perplexing “*for*” seems to point to one of those suppressed trains of thought which are so frequent in St. John. I understand it to mean that at Nazareth, in His own home, rejection awaited Him in spite of the first gleam of transient acceptance; and that for this rejection He was not unprepared, *for* it was one of His distinct statements that “in His own country a Prophet is dishonoured.”

It was not the object of St. John to dwell on the ministry in Galilee, which had been already narrated by the Synoptists; accordingly it is from St. Luke that we receive the fullest account of our Lord's first public act in His native town.

It appears that Jesus did not go direct from Sychar to Nazareth. On His way (unless we take Luke iv. 15 for a general and unchronological reference) He taught continuously, and with general admiration and acceptance, in the synagogues of Galilee. In this way He arrived at Nazareth, and according to His usual custom, for He had doubtless been a silent worshipper in that humble place Sabbath after Sabbath from boyhood upwards, He entered into the synagogue on the Sabbath day.

There was but one synagogue in the little town, and probably it resembled in all respects, except in its humbler aspect and materials, the synagogues of which we see the ruins at Tell Hûm and Irbid. It was simply a rectangular hall, with a pillared portico of Grecian archi-

ecture, of which the further extremity (where the "sanctuary" was placed) usually pointed towards Jerusalem, which, since the time of Solomon, had always been the *kibleh*—*i.e.*, the consecrated *direction*—of a Jew's worship, as Mecca is of a Mohammedan's. In wealthier places it was built of white marble, and sculptured on the outside in alto-relievo, with rude ornaments of vine-leaves and grapes, or the budding rod and the pot of manna. On entering there were seats on one side for the men; on the other, behind a lattice, were seated the women, shrouded in their long veils. At one end was the *tebhah* or ark of painted wood, which contained the sacred scriptures; and at one side was the *bîma*, or elevated seat for the reader or preacher. Clergy, properly speaking, there were none, but in the chief seats were the ten or more *batlanîm*, "men of leisure," or leading members of the congregation, and the chief of the synagogue, or *rôsh hak-kenéseth*. Inferior in rank to these were the *chazzân*, or clerk, whose duty it was to keep the sacred books; the *shelîach*, corresponding to our sacristan or verger; and the *parnosîm*, or shepherds, who in some respects acted as deacons.

The service of the synagogue was not unlike our own. After the prayers two lessons were always read, one from the Law called *parashah*, and one from the Prophets called *haphtarah*; and as there were no ordained ministers to conduct the services—for the office of priests and Levites at Jerusalem was wholly different—these lessons might not only be read by any competent person who received permission from the *rôsh hak-kenéseth*, but he was even at liberty to add his own *midrash*, or comment.

The reading of the *parashah*, or lesson from the Pentateuch, was apparently over when Jesus ascended the steps of the *bîma*. Recognising His claim to perform the honourable function of a *maphîr* or reader, the *chazzân* drew aside the silk curtain of the painted ark which contained the sacred manuscripts, and handed Him the *megillah* or roll of the Prophet Isaiah, which contained the *haphtarah* of the day. Our Lord unrolled the volume, and found the well-known passage in Isaiah lxi. The whole congregation stood up to listen to Him. The length of the *haphtarah* might be from three to twenty-one verses; but Jesus only read the first and part of the second, stopping short, in a spirit of tenderness, before the stern expression, "The day of vengeance of our God," so that the gracious words, "The acceptable year of the Lord," might rest last upon their ears and form the text of His discourse. He then rolled up the *megillah*, handed it

back to the *chazzan*, and, as was customary among the Jews, sat down to deliver His sermon.

The passage which He had read, whether part of the ordinary lesson for the day or chosen by Himself, was a very remarkable one, and it must have derived additional grandeur and solemnity from the lips of Him in whom it was fulfilled. Every eye in the synagogue was fixed upon Him with a gaze of intense earnestness, and we may imagine the thrill of awful expectation and excitement which passed through the hearts of the listeners, as, in a discourse of which the subject only is preserved for us by the Evangelist, He developed the theme that He was Himself the Messiah, of whom the great Prophet had sung 700 years before. His words were full of a grace, an authority, a power which was at first irresistible, and which commanded the involuntary astonishment of all. But as He proceeded He became conscious of a change. The spell of His wisdom and sweetness was broken, as these rude and violent Nazarenes began to realise the full meaning of His Divine claims. It was customary with the Jews in the worship of their synagogue to give full vent to their feelings, and it was not long before Jesus became sensible of indignant and rebellious murmurs. He saw that those eager glittering eyes, which had been fixed upon Him in the first excitement of attention, were beginning to glow with the malignant light of jealousy and hatred. “Is not this *the carpenter* ? is He not the brother of workmen like Himself—James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas—and of sisters who live among us ? do not even His own family disbelieve in Him ?” Such were the whispers which began to be buzzed about among the audience. This was no young and learned Rabbi from the schools of Gamaliel or Shammai, and yet He spoke with an authority which not even the great scribes assumed ! Even a Hillel, when his doctrines failed to persuade, could only secure conviction by appealing to the previous authority of a Shemaia or an Abtalion. But *this* teacher appealed to no one—this teacher who had but been their village carpenter ! What business had *He* to teach ? Whence could He know letters, having never learned ?

Jesus did not leave unobserved the change which was passing over the feelings of His audience. He at once told them that He *was* the Jesus whom they described, and yet with no abatement of His Messianic grandeur. Their hardness and unbelief had already depressed His spirit before He had even entered the synagogue. The implied slur on the humility of His previous life He passes by ; it was too essentially provincial and innately vulgar to need correction, since any

Nazarene of sufficient honesty might have reminded himself of the yet humbler origin of the great herdsman Amos. Nor would He notice the base hatred which weak and bad men always contract for those who shame them by the silent superiority of noble lives. But He was aware of another feeling in their minds; a demand upon Him for some stupendous vindication of His claims; a jealousy that He should have performed miracles at Cana, and given an impression of His power at Capernaum, to say nothing of what He had done and taught at Jerusalem—and yet that He should have vouchsafed no special mark of His favour among them. He knew that the taunting and sceptical proverb, “Physician, heal thyself,” was in their hearts, and all but on their lips. But to show them most clearly that He was something more than they—that He was no mere Nazarene, like any other who might have lived among them for thirty years, and that He belonged not to them but to the world—He reminds them that miracles are not to be limited by geographical relationships—that Elijah had only saved the Phœnician widow of Sarepta, and Elisha only healed the hostile leper of Syria.

*What* then? were they in *His* estimation (and He but the “carpenter!”) no better than Gentiles and lepers? This was the climax of all that was intolerable to them, as coming from a fellow-townsmen whom they wished to rank among themselves; and at these words their long-suppressed fury burst into a flame. The speaker was no longer interrupted by a murmur of disapprobation, but by a roar of wrath. With one of those bursts of sanguinary excitement which characterised that strange, violent, impassioned people—a people whose minds are swept by storms as sudden as those which in one moment lash into fury the mirror surface of their lake—they rose in a body, tore Him out of the city, and then dragged Him to the brow of the hill above. The little town of Nazareth nestles in the southern hollows of that hill; many a mass of precipitous rock lies imbedded on its slopes, and it is probable that the hill-side may have been far more steep and precipitous two thousand years ago. To one of these rocky escarpments they dragged Him, in order to fling Him headlong down.

But His hour was not yet come, and they were saved from the consummation of a crime which would have branded them with everlasting infamy. “He passed through the midst of them, and went on His way.” There is no need to suppose an actual miracle; still less to imagine a secret and sudden escape into the narrow and tortuous lanes

of the town. Perhaps His silence, perhaps the calm nobleness of His bearing, perhaps the dauntless innocence of His gaze overawed them. Apart from anything supernatural, there seems to have been in the presence of Jesus a spell of mystery and of majesty which even His most ruthless and hardened enemies acknowledged, and before which they involuntarily bowed. It was to this that He owed His escape when the maddened Jews in the Temple took up stones to stone Him; it was this that made the bold and bigoted officers of the Sanhedrin unable to arrest Him as He taught in public during the Feast of Tabernacles at Jerusalem; it was this that made the armed band of His enemies, at His mere look, fall before Him to the ground in the Garden of Gethsemane. Suddenly, quietly, He asserted His freedom, waived aside His captors, and overawing them by His simple glance, passed through their midst unharmed. Similar events have occurred in history, and continue still to occur. There is something in defenceless and yet dauntless dignity that calms even the fury of a mob. "They stood—stopped—inquired—were ashamed—fled—separated."

And so He left them, never apparently to return again; never, if we are right in the view here taken, to preach again in their little synagogue. Did any feelings of merely human regret weigh down His soul while He was wending His weary steps down the steep hill-slope, towards Cana of Galilee? Did any tear start in His eyes unbidden as He stood, perhaps for the last time, to gaze from thence on the rich plain of Esdraelon, and the purple heights of Carmel, and the white sands that fringe the blue waters of the Mediterranean? Were there any from whom He grieved to be severed, in the green secluded valley where His manhood had laboured, and His childhood played? Did He cast one longing, lingering glance at the humble home in which for so many years He had toiled as the village carpenter? Did no companion of His innocent boyhood, no friend of His sinless youth, accompany Him with awe, and pity, and regret? Such questions are not, surely, unnatural; not, surely, irreverent;—but they are not answered. Of all merely human emotions of His heart, except so far as they directly affect His mission upon earth, the Gospels are silent. We know only that henceforth other friends awaited Him away from boorish Nazareth, among the gentle and noble-hearted fishermen of Bethsaida; and that thenceforth His home, so far as He had a home, was in the little city of Capernaum, beside the sunlit waters of the Galilæan Lake.

## CHAPTER XVII.

## THE BEGINNING OF THE GALILÆAN MINISTRY.

REJECTED of Nazareth, our Lord naturally turned to the neighbouring Cana, where His first miracle had been wrought to gladden friends. He had not long arrived when an officer from the neighbouring court of Herod Antipas, hearing of His arrival, came and urgently entreated that He would descend to Capernaum and heal his dying son. Although our Lord never set foot in Tiberias, yet the voice of John had more than once been listened to with alarm and reverence in the court of the voluptuous king. We know that Manaen, the foster-brother of Herod, was in after days a Christian, and we know that among the women who ministered to Christ of their substance was Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward. As this courtier (*βασιλικὸς*) believed in Christ with his whole house, in consequence of the miracle now wrought, it has been conjectured with some probability that it was none other than Chuza himself.

The imperious urgency of his request, a request which appears at first to have had but little root in spiritual conviction, needed a momentary check. It was necessary for Jesus to show that He was no mere *hakeem*, no mere benevolent physician, ready at any time to work local cures, and to place His supernatural powers at the beck and call of any sufferer who might come to Him as a desperate resource. He at once rebuked the spirit which demanded mere signs and prodigies as the sole possible ground of faith. But yielding to the father's passionate earnestness, He dismissed him with the assurance that his son lived. The interview had taken place at the seventh hour—*i.e.*, at one o'clock in the day. Even in the short November day it would have been still possible for the father to get to Capernaum; for if Cana be, as we believe, Kefr Kenna, it is not more than five hours' distance from Capernaum. But the father's soul had been calmed by faith in Christ's promise, and he slept that night at some intermediate spot upon the road. The next day his slaves met him, and told him that, at the very hour when Jesus had spoken, the fever had left his son. This was the second time that Christ had signalled His arrival in Galilee by the performance of a conspicuous miracle. The position of the courtier caused it to be widely known, and it contributed, no doubt, to that joyous and enthusiastic welcome which our Lord received during that bright early period of His ministry, which has been beautifully called the "Galilæan spring."

At this point we are again met by difficulties in the chronology, which are not only serious, but to the certain solution of which there appears to be no clue. If we follow exclusively the order given by one Evangelist, we appear to run counter to the scattered indications which may be found in another. That it should be so will cause no difficulty to the candid mind. The Evangelists do not profess to be scrupulously guided by chronological sequence. The pictures which they give of the main events in the life of Christ are simple and harmonious, and that they should be presented in an informal, and what, with reference to mere literary considerations, would be called inartistic manner, is not only in accordance with the position of the writers, but is an additional confirmation of our conviction that we are reading the records of a life which, in its majesty and beauty, infinitely transcended the capacities of invention or imagination in the simple and faithful annalists by whom it was recorded.

It was not, as we have already observed, the object of St. John to narrate the Galilæan ministry, the existence of which he distinctly implies (vii. 3, 4), but which had already been fully recorded. Circumstances had given to the Evangelist a minute and profound knowledge of the ministry in Judæa, which is by the others presupposed, though not narrated. At this point accordingly (iv. 54) he breaks off, and only continues the thread of his narrative at the return of Jesus to "a" or "the" feast of the Jews (v. 1). If the feast here alluded to were the feast of Purim, as we shall see is probably the case, then St. John here passes over the history of several months. We fall back, therefore, on the Synoptic Gospels for the events of the intervening ministry on the shores of Gennesareth. And since we have often to choose between the order of events as narrated by the three Evangelists, we must here follow that given by St. Luke, both because it appears to us intrinsically probable, and because St. Luke, unlike the two previous Evangelists, seems to have been guided, so far as his information allowed, by chronological considerations.

It seems then that, after leaving Cana, our Lord went at once to Capernaum, accompanied apparently by His mother and His brethren, and made that town His home. His sisters were probably married, and did not leave their native Nazareth; but the dreadful insult which Jesus had received would have been alone sufficient to influence His family to leave the place, even if they did not directly share in the odium and persecution which His words had caused. Perhaps the growing alienation between Himself and them may have been due, in



part, to this circumstance. They must have felt, and we know that they did feel, a deeply-seated annoyance, if, refusing to admit the full awfulness of His mission, and entirely disapproving the form of its manifestation, they yet felt themselves involved in hatred and ruin as a direct consequence of His actions. Certain it is that, although apparently they were living at Capernaum, *their* home was not *His* home. Home, in the strict sense, He had none; but the house of which He made ordinary use appears to have been that which belonged to His chief apostle. It is true that Simon and Andrew are said to have belonged to Bethsaida, but they may easily have engaged the use of a house at Capernaum, belonging to Peter's mother-in-law; or, since Bethsaida is little more than a suburb or part of Capernaum, they may have actually moved for the convenience of their Master from the one place to the other.

The first three Evangelists have given us a detailed account of the Lord's first Sabbath at Capernaum, and it has for us an intrinsic interest, because it gives us one remarkable specimen of the manner in which He spent the days of His active ministry. It is the best commentary on that epitome of His life which presents it to us in its most splendid originality—that “He went about doing good.” It is the point which the rarest and noblest of His followers have found it most difficult to imitate; it is the point in which His life transcended most absolutely the ideal of the attainments of His very greatest forerunners. The seclusion of the hermit, the self-maceration of the ascetic, the rapture of the mystic—all these are easier and more common than the unwearied toil of a self-renouncing love.

The day began in the synagogue, perhaps in the very building which the Jews owed to the munificence of the centurion proselyte. If Capernaum were indeed Tell Hûm, then the white marble ruins which still stand on a little eminence above the sparkling lake, and still encumber the now waste and desolate site of the town with their fragments of elaborate sculpture, may possibly be the ruins of this very building. The synagogue, which is not very large, must have been densely crowded; and to teach an earnest and expectant crowd—to teach as He taught, not in dull, dead, conventional formulæ, but with thoughts that breathed and words that burned—to teach as they do who are swayed by the emotion of the hour, while heart speaks to heart—must have required no slight energy of life, must have involved no little exhaustion of the physical powers. But this was not all. While He was speaking, while the audience of simple-hearted yet

faithful, intelligent, warlike people were listening to him in mute astonishment, hanging on his lips with deep and reverential admiration—suddenly the deep silence was broken by the wild cries and obscene ravings of one of those unhappy wretches who were universally believed to be under the influence of impure spirits, and who—in the absence of any retreat for such sufferers—had, perhaps, slipped in unobserved among the throng. Even the poor demoniac, in the depths of his perturbed and degraded nature, had felt the haunting spell of that pure presence, of that holy voice, of that divine and illuminating message. But, distorted as his whole moral being was, he raved against it, as though by the voices of the evil demons who possessed him, and while he saluted “Jesus the Nazarene” as the Holy One of God, yet, with agonies of terror and hatred, he demanded to be let alone, and not to be destroyed.

Then followed a scene of thrilling excitement. Turning to the furious and raving sufferer, recognising the duality of his consciousness, addressing the devil which seemed to be forcing from him these terrified ejaculations, Jesus said, “Hold thy peace, and come out of him.” He never accepted or tolerated this ghastly testimony to His origin and office. The calm, the sweetness, the power of the divine utterance were irresistible. The demoniac fell to the ground in a fearful paroxysm, screaming and convulsed. But it was soon over. The man arose cured; his whole look and bearing showed that he was dispossessed of the over-mastering influence, and was now in his right mind. A miracle so gracious and so commanding had never before been so strikingly manifested, and the worshippers separated with emotions of indescribable wonder.

Rising from the seat of the *maphtâr* in the synagogue, Christ retired into the house of Simon. Here again he was met by the strong appeal of sickness and suffering. Simon, whom he had already bound to Himself on the banks of the Jordan, by the first vague call to his future Apostolate, was a married man, and his wife’s mother lay stricken down by a violent access of fever. One request from the afflicted family was sufficient; there was no need, as in the case of the more worldly nobleman, for importunate entreaty. He stood over her; He took her by the hand; He raised her up; He rebuked the fever; His voice, stirring her whole being, dominated over the sources of disease, and, restored instantaneously to health, she rose and busied herself about the household duties.

Possibly the strictness of observance which marked the Jewish

Sabbath secured for our Lord a brief interval for refreshment ; but no sooner did the sun begin to set, than the eager multitude, barely waiting for the full close of the Sabbath hours, began to seek His aid. The whole city came densely thronging round the doors of the humble home, bringing with them their demoniacs and their diseased. What a strange scene! There lay the limpid lake, reflecting in pale rose-colour the last flush of sunset that gilded the western hills ; and here, amid the peace of Nature, was exposed, in hideous variety, the sickness and misery of man, while the stillness of the Sabbath twilight was broken by the shrieks of demoniacs who testified to the Presence of the Son of God.

“ A lazar-house it seemed, wherein were laid  
Numbers of all diseased ; all maladies  
Of ghastly spasm, and racking tortures, qualms  
Of heart-sick agony, all feverous kinds,  
Demoniac phrenzy, moping melancholy  
And moonstruck madness ; ”

and amidst them all, not

“ Despair  
Tended the sick, busiest from couch to couch,  
And over them triumphant Death his dart  
Shook, ” . . . .

but far into the deepening dusk, the only person there who was unexcited and unalarmed—hushing by His voice the delirium of madness and the screams of epilepsy, touching disease into health again by laying on each unhappy and tortured sufferer His pure and gentle hands—moved, in His love and tenderness, the young Prophet of Nazareth, the Christ, the Saviour of the world. Unalarmed indeed, and unexcited, but not free from sorrow and suffering. For sympathy is nothing else than a fellow-feeling with others : a sensible participation in their joy or woe. And Jesus was touched with a feeling of their infirmities. Those cries pierced to His inmost heart ; the groans and sighs of all that collective misery filled His whole soul with pity. He bled for them ; He suffered with them ; their agonies were His ; so that the Evangelist St. Matthew recalls and echoes in this place, with a slight difference of language, the words of Isaiah, “ Surely He bore our griefs and carried our sorrows.”

The fame of that marvellous day rang through all Galilee and Peræa, and even to the farthest parts of Syria ; and we might well have imagined that the wearied Saviour would have needed a long repose. But to Him the dearest and best repose was solitude and

silence, where He might be alone and undisturbed with His heavenly Father. The little plain of Gennesareth was still covered with the deep darkness which precedes the dawn, when, unobserved by all, Jesus rose and went away to a desert place, and there refreshed His spirit with quiet prayer. Although the work which He was sent to do obliged Him often to spend His days amid thronging and excited multitudes, He did not love the tumult, and avoided even the admiration and gratitude of those who felt in His presence a spring of life. But He was not suffered thus to remain, even for a brief period, in rest and seclusion. The multitude sought Him persistently; Simon and his friends almost hunted for Him in their eager desire to see and to hear. They even wished to detain Him among them by gentle force. But He quietly resisted their importunity. It was not His object to become the centre of an admiring populace, or to spend His whole time in working miracles, which, though they were deeds of mercy, were mainly intended to open their hearts to His divine teaching. His blessings were not to be confined to Capernaum. Dalmanutha, Magdala, Bethsaida, Chorazin, were all near at hand. "Let us go," He said, "to the adjoining country towns, to preach the kingdom of God there also; for therefore am I sent."

It is doubtful, however, whether Jesus put His intention into instant effect. It seems as if He so far yielded to the anxiety of the multitude as to give them one more address before He set forth to preach in that populous neighbourhood. He bent His steps towards the shore, and probably to the spot where the little boats of His earliest disciples were anchored, near the beach of hard white sand which lines the water-side at Bethsaida. At no great distance behind Him followed an ever-gathering concourse of people from all the neighbourhood; and while He stopped to speak to them, the two pairs of fisher-brethren, Simon and Andrew, and James and John, pursued the toils by which they earned their daily bread. While Jesus had retired to rest for a few short hours of the night, Simon and his companions, impelled by the necessities of a lot which they seem to have borne with noble-minded cheerfulness, had been engaged in fishing; and, having been wholly unsuccessful, two of them, seated on the shore—probably, in that clear still atmosphere, within hearing of His voice—were occupying their time in washing, and two, seated in their boat with their hired servants, and Zebedee, their father, were mending their nets. As Jesus spoke, the multitude—some in their desire to catch every syllable that fell from the lips of Him who spake as never

man spake, and some in their longing to touch Him, and so be healed of whatever plagues they had—thronged upon Him closer and closer, impeding His movements with dangerous and unseemly pressure. He therefore beckoned to Simon to get into his boat and push it ashore, so that he might step on board of it, and teach the people from thence. Seated in this pleasant pulpit, safe from the inconvenient contact with the multitude, He taught them from the little boat as it rocked on the blue ripples, sparkling in the morning sun. And when His sermon was over, He thought not of Himself and of His own fatigue, but of His poor and disappointed disciples. He knew that they had toiled in vain; He had observed that even while He spoke they had been preparing for some future and more prosperous expedition; and with a sympathy which never omitted an act of kindness, He ordered Peter to push out his boat into the deep, and all of them to cast out their nets once more. Peter was in a despondent mood; but the mere word of One whom he so deeply revered, and whose power he had already witnessed, was sufficient. And his faith was rewarded. Instantly a vast haul of fishes crowded into the nets.

A busy scene followed. The instinct of work first prevailed. Simon and Andrew beckoned to Zebedee and his sons and servants to come in their boat and help to save the miraculous draught and straining nets; both boats were filled to the gunwale with the load; and at the first moment that the work was finished, and Peter recognised the whole force of the miracle, he falls, with his usual eager impetuosity, at his Master's feet—to thank Him? to offer Him henceforth an absolute devotion? No; but (and here we have a touch of indescribable truthfulness, utterly beyond the power of the most consummate intellect to have invented) to exclaim, "DEPART FROM ME, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" A flash of supernatural illumination had revealed to him both his own sinful unworthiness and who He was who was with him in the boat. It was the cry of self-loathing which had already realised something nobler. It was the first impulse of fear and amazement, before they had had time to grow into adoration and love. St. Peter did not *mean* the "Depart from me;" he only meant—and this was known to the Searcher of hearts—"I am utterly unworthy to be near Thee, yet let me stay." How unlike was this cry of his passionate and trembling humility to the bestial ravings of the unclean spirits, who bade the Lord to let them alone, or to the hardened degradation of the filthy Gadarenes, who preferred to the presence of their Saviour the tending of their swine!

And how gently the answer came: “Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men.” Our Lord, as in all His teaching, seized and applied with exquisite significance the circumstances of the moment. Round them in the little boat lay in heaps the glittering spoil of the lake—glittering, but with a glitter that began to fade in death. Henceforth that sinful man, washed and cleansed, and redeemed and sanctified, was to chase, with nobler labour, a spoil which, by being entangled in the Gospel net, would not die, but be saved alive. And his brother, and his partners, they, too, were to become “fishers of men.” This final call was enough. They had already been called by Jesus on the banks of Jordan; they had already heard the Baptist’s testimony; but they had not yet been bidden to forsake all and follow Him; they had not yet grown familiar with the miracles of power which confirmed their faith; they had not yet learned fully to recognise that they who followed Him were not only safe in His holy keeping, but should receive a thousandfold more in all that constitutes true and worthy happiness even in this life—in the world to come, life everlasting.

We have already seen that, at the very beginning of His ministry, our Lord had prepared six of His Apostles for a call to His future service; four of whom were on this occasion bidden not only to regard Him as their Master, but henceforth to leave all and follow Him. There was but one other of the Apostles who received a separate call—the Evangelist, St. Matthew. His call, though narrated in different sequences by each of the Synoptists, probably took place about this time. At or near Capernaum there was a receipt of custom. Lying as the town did at the nucleus of roads which diverged to Tyre, to Damascus, to Jerusalem, and to Sepphoris, it was a busy centre of merchandise, and therefore a natural place for the collection of tribute and taxes. These imposts were to the Jews pre-eminently distasteful. The mere fact of having to pay them wounded their tenderest sensibilities. They were not only a badge of servitude; they were not only a daily and terrible witness that God seemed to have forsaken His land, and that all the splendid Messianic hopes and promises of their earlier history were merged in the disastrous twilight of subjugation to a foreign rule which was cruelly and contemptuously enforced; but, more than this, the mere payment of such imposts wore almost the appearance of apostacy to the sensitive and scrupulous mind of a genuine Jew. It seemed to be a violation of the first principles of the Theocracy, such as could only be excused as the result of absolute compulsion. We cannot, therefore, wonder that the

officers who gathered these taxes were regarded with profound dislike. It must be remembered that those with whom the provincials came in contact were not the Roman knights—the real *publicani*, who farmed the taxes—but were the merest subordinates, often chosen from the dregs of the people, and so notorious as a class for their malpractices, that they were regarded almost with horror, and were always included in the same category with harlots and sinners. When an occupation is thus despised and detested, it is clear that its members are apt to sink to the level at which they are placed by the popular odium. And if a Jew could scarcely persuade himself that it was right to *pay* taxes, how much more heinous a crime must it have been in his eyes to become the questionably-honest instrument for *collecting* them? If a publican was hated, how still more intense must have been the disgust entertained against a publican who was also a Jew?

But He who came to seek and save the lost—He who could evoke Christian holiness out of the midst of heathen corruption—could make, even out of a Jewish publican, the Apostle and the first Evangelist of a new and living faith. His choice of apostles was dictated by a spirit far different from that of calculating policy or conventional prudence. He rejected the dignified scribe (Matt. viii. 19); He chose the despised and hated tax-gatherer. It was the glorious unworldliness of a Divine insight and a perfect charity, and St. Matthew more than justified it by turning his knowledge of writing to a sacred use, and becoming the earliest biographer of his Saviour and his Lord.

No doubt Matthew had heard some of the discourses, had seen some of the miracles of Christ. His heart had been touched, and to the eyes of Him who despised none and despaired of none, the publican, even as he sat at “the receipt of custom,” was ready for the call. One word was enough. The “Follow me” which showed to Matthew that his Lord loved him, and was ready to use him as a chosen instrument in spreading the good tidings of the kingdom of God, was sufficient to break the temptations of avarice and the routine of a daily calling, and “he left all, rose up, and followed Him,” touched into noblest transformation by the Ithuriel-spear of a forgiving and redeeming love.