

blasphemer of their God. The first crime was sufficient cause for opposition and persecution; the second an ample justification of persistent and active endeavours to bring about His death.

But at present they could do nothing; they could only rage in impotent indignation; they could only gnash with their teeth and melt away. Whatever may have been the cause, as yet they dared not act. A power greater than their own restrained them. The hour of their triumph was not yet come; only, from this moment, there went forth against Him from the hearts of those Priests and Rabbis and Pharisees the inexorable irrevocable sentence of violent death.

And under such circumstances it was useless, and worse than useless, for Him to remain in Judæa, where every day was a day of peril from these angry and powerful conspirators. He could no longer remain in Jerusalem for the approaching Passover, but must return to Galilee; but He returned with a clear vision of the fatal end, with full knowledge that the hours of light in which He could still work were already fading into the dusk, and that the rest of His work would be accomplished with the secret sense that death was hanging over His devoted head.

LESSON FIFTEEN

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE MURDER OF JOHN THE BAPTIST.

It must have been with His human heart full of foreboding sadness that the Saviour returned to Galilee. In His own obscure Nazareth He had before been violently rejected; He had now been rejected no less decisively at Jerusalem by the leading authorities of His own nation. He was returning to an atmosphere already darkened by the storm-clouds of gathering opposition; and He had scarcely returned when upon that atmosphere, like the first note of a death-knell tolling ruin, there broke the intelligence of a dreadful martyrdom. The heaven-enkindled and shining lamp had suddenly been quenched in blood. The great Forerunner—he who was greatest of those born of women—the prophet, and more than a prophet, had been foully murdered.

Herod Antipas, to whom, on the death of Herod the Great, had fallen the tetrarchy of Galilee, was about as weak and miserable a prince as ever disgraced the throne of an afflicted country. Cruel, crafty, and voluptuous like his father, he was also, unlike him, weak in war and vacillating in peace. In him, as in so many characters which stand conspicuous on the stage of history, infidelity and superstition went hand in hand. But the morbid terrors of a guilty conscience did not save him from the criminal extravagances of a violent will. He was a man in whom were mingled the worst features of the Roman, the Oriental, and the Greek.

It was the policy of the numerous princelings who owed their very existence to Roman intervention, to pay frequent visits of ceremony to the Emperor at Rome. During one of these visits, possibly to condole with Tiberius on the death of his son Drusus, or his mother Livia, Antipas had been, while at Rome, the guest of his brother Herod Philip—not the tetrarch of that name, but a son of Herod the Great and Mariamne, daughter of Simon the Boëthusian, who having been disinherited by his father, was living at Rome as a private person. Here he became entangled by the snares of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife; and he repaid the hospitality he had received by carrying her off. Everything combined to make the act as detestable as it was ungrateful and treacherous. The Herods carried intermarriage to an extent which only prevailed in the worst and most dissolute of the Oriental and post-Macedonian dynasties. Herodias being the daughter of Aristobulus, was not only the sister-in-law, but also the niece of Antipas; she had already borne to her husband a daughter, who was now grown up. Antipas had himself long been married to the daughter of Aretas, or Hâreth, Emîr of Arabia, and neither he nor Herodias were young enough to plead even the poor excuse of youthful passion. The sole temptation on his side was an impotent sensuality; on hers an extravagant ambition. She preferred a marriage doubly adulterous and doubly incestuous to a life spent with the only Herod who could not boast even the fraction of a vice-regal throne. Antipas promised on his return from Rome to make her his wife, and she exacted from him a pledge that he would divorce his innocent consort, the daughter of the Arabian prince.

But “our pleasant vices,” it has well been said, “are made the instruments to punish us;” and from this moment began for Herod Antipas a series of annoyances and misfortunes, which only culminated in his death years afterwards in discrowned royalty, and unpitied exile.

Herodias became from the first the evil genius of his house. The people were scandalised and outraged. Family dissensions were embittered. The Arabian princess, without waiting to be divorced, indignantly fled, first to the border castle of Machærus, and then to the rocky fastnesses of her father Hâreth at Petra. He, in his just indignation, broke off all amicable relations with his quondam son-in-law, and subsequently declared war against him, in which he avenged himself by the infliction of a severe and ruinous defeat.

Nor was this all. Sin was punished with sin, and the adulterous union had to be cemented with a prophet's blood. In the gay and gilded halls of any one of those sumptuous palaces which the Herods delighted to build, the dissolute tyrant may have succeeded perhaps in shutting out the deep murmur of his subjects' indignation; but there was one voice which reached him, and agitated his conscience, and would not be silenced. It was the voice of the great Baptist. How Herod had been thrown first into connection with him we do not know, but it was probably after he had seized possession of his person on the political plea that his teaching, and the crowds who flocked to him, tended to endanger the public safety. Among other features in the character of Herod was a certain superstitious curiosity which led him to hanker after and tamper with the truths of the religion which his daily life so flagrantly violated. He summoned John to his presence. Like a new Elijah before another Ahab—clothed in his desert raiment, the hairy cloak and the leathern girdle—the stern and lonely eremite stood fearless before the incestuous king. His words—the simple words of truth and justice—the calm reasonings about righteousness, temperance, and the judgment to come—fell like flakes of fire on that hard and icy conscience. Herod, alarmed perhaps by the fulfilment of the old curse of the Mosaic law in the childlessness of his union, listened with some dim and feeble hope of future amendment. He even did many things gladly because of John. But there was *one* thing which he *would* not do—perhaps persuaded himself that he *could* not do—and that was, give up the guilty love which mastered him, or dismiss the haughty imperious woman who ruled his life after ruining his peace. “It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife” was the blunt declaration of the dauntless Prophet; and though time after time he might be led over those splendid floors, pale and wasted with imprisonment and disappointed hope, yet, though he well knew that it kindled against him an implacable enmity and doomed him to a fresh remand to his solitary cell, he never hesitated to

face the flushed and angry Herod with that great *Non licet*. Nor did he spare his stern judgment on all the other crimes and follies of Herod's life. Other men—even men otherwise great and good—have had very smooth words for the sins of princes; but in the fiery soul of the Baptist, strengthened into noblest exercise by the long asceticism of the wilderness, there was no dread of human royalty and no compromise with exalted vice. And when courage and holiness and purity thus stood to rebuke the lustful meanness of a servile and corrupted soul, can we wonder if even among his glittering courtiers and reckless men-at-arms the king cowered conscience-stricken before the fettered prisoner? But John knew how little trust can be placed in a soul that has been eaten away by a besetting sin; and since He to whom he had borne witness beyond Jordan wrought no miracle of power for his deliverance, it is not probable that he looked for any passage out of his dungeon in the Black Fortress, save through the grave and gate of death.

Hitherto, indeed, the timidity or the scruples of Herod Antipas had afforded to John—so far as his mere life was concerned—a precarious protection from the concentrated venom of an adulteress's hate. But at last what she had failed to gain by passionate influence she succeeded in gaining by subtle fraud. She knew well that even from his prison the voice of John might be more powerful than all the influences of her fading beauty, and might succeed at last in tearing from her forehead that guilty crown. But she watched her opportunity, and was not long in gaining her end.

The Herodian princes, imitating the luxurious example of their great prototypes, the Roman emperors, were fond of magnificent banquets and splendid anniversaries. Among others they had adopted the heathen fashion of birthday celebrations, and Antipas on his birthday—apparently either at Machærus or at a neighbouring palace called Julias—prepared a banquet for his courtiers, and generals, and Galilæan nobles. The wealth of the Herods, the expensive architecture of their numerous palaces, their tendency to extravagant display, make it certain that nothing would be wanting to such a banquet which wealth or royalty could procure; and there is enough to show that it was on the model of those

“Sumptuous gluttonies and gorgeous feasts
On citron table or Atlantic stone,”

which accorded with the depraved fashion of the Empire, and mingled Roman gluttony with Ionic sensuality. But Herodias had craftily

provided the king with an unexpected and exciting pleasure, the spectacle of which would be sure to enrapture such guests as his. Dancers and dancing-women were at that time in great request. The passion for witnessing these too often indecent and degrading representations had naturally made its way into the Sadducean and semi-pagan court of these usurping Edomites, and Herod the Great had built in his palace a theatre for the Thymelici. A luxurious feast of the period was not regarded as complete unless it closed with some gross pantomimic representation; and doubtless Herod had adopted the evil fashion of his day. But he had not anticipated for his guests the rare luxury of seeing a princess—his own niece, a granddaughter of Herod the Great and of Mariamne, a descendant therefore of Simon the High Priest, and the great line of Maccabæan princes—a princess who afterwards became the wife of a tetrarch, and the mother of a king—honouring them by degrading herself into a scenic dancer. And yet when the banquet was over, when the guests were full of meat and flushed with wine, Salome herself, the daughter of Herodias, then in the prime of her young and lustrous beauty, executed, as it would now be expressed, a *pas seul* “in the midst of” those dissolute and half-intoxicated revellers. “She came in and danced, and pleased Herod, and them that sat at meat with him.” And he, like another Xerxes, in the delirium of his drunken approval, swore to this degraded girl in the presence of his guests that he would give her anything for which she asked, even to the half of his kingdom.

The girl flew to her mother, and said, “What shall I ask?” It was exactly what Herodias expected, and she might have asked for robes, or jewels, or palaces, or whatever such a woman loves; but to a mind like hers revenge was sweeter than wealth or pride, and we may imagine with what fierce malice she hissed out the unhesitating answer, “The head of John the Baptist.” And coming in before the king *immediately with haste*—(what a touch is that! and how apt a pupil did the wicked mother find in her wicked daughter)—Salome exclaimed, “My wish is that you give *me here, immediately*, on a dish, the head of John the Baptist.” Her indecent haste, her hideous petition, showed that she shared the furies of her race. Did she think that in that infamous period, and among those infamous guests, her petition would be received with a burst of laughter? Did she hope to kindle their merriment to a still higher pitch by the sense of the delightful wickedness involved in a young and beautiful girl asking

—nay, imperiously demanding—that then and there, on one of the golden dishes which graced the board, should be given into her own hands the gory head of the Prophet whose words had made a thousand bold hearts quail?

If so, she was disappointed. The tetrarch, at any rate, was plunged into grief by her request; it more than did away with the pleasure of her disgraceful dance: it was a bitter termination of his birthday feast. Fear, policy, remorse, superstition, even whatever poor spark of better feeling remained unquenched under the dense white ashes of a heart consumed by evil passions, all made him shrink in disgust from this sudden execution. He must have felt that he had been egregiously duped out of his own will by the cunning stratagem of his unrelenting paramour. If a single touch of manliness had been left in him he would have repudiated the request as one which did not fall either under the letter or the spirit of his oath, since the life of one cannot be made the gift to another; or he would have boldly declared at once, that if such was her choice, his oath was more honoured by being broken than by being kept. But a despicable pride and fear of man prevailed over his better impulses. More afraid of the criticisms of his guests than of the future torment of such conscience as was left him, he immediately sent an executioner to the prison, which in all probability was not far from the banqueting hall; and so, at the bidding of a dissolute coward, and to please the loathly fancies of a shameless girl, the axe fell, and the head of the noblest of the prophets was shorn away.

In darkness and in secrecy the scene was enacted, and if any saw it their lips were sealed; but the executioner emerged into the light carrying by the hair that noble head, and then and there, in all the ghastliness of recent death, it was placed upon a dish from the royal table. The young dancing girl received it, and—now frightful as a *Megæra*—carried the hideous burden to her mother. Let us hope that the awful spectacle haunted the souls of both thenceforth till death.

What became of that ghastly relic we do not know. Tradition tells us that Herodias ordered the headless trunk to be flung out over the battlements for dogs and vultures to devour. On her, at any rate, swift vengeance fell.

The disciples of John—perhaps Manaen the Essene, the foster-brother of Herod Antipas, may have been among them—took up the corpse and buried it. Their next care was to go and tell Jesus, some of them, it may be, with sore and bitter hearts, that his friend and

forerunner—the first who had borne witness to Him, and over whom He had Himself pronounced so great an eulogy—was dead.

And about the same time His Apostles also returned from their mission, and told Him all that they had done and taught. They had preached repentance: they had cast out devils; they had anointed the sick with oil and healed them. But the record of their ministry is very brief, and not very joyous. In spite of partial successes, it seemed as if their untried faith had as yet proved inadequate for the high task imposed on them.

And very shortly afterwards another piece of intelligence reached Jesus; it was that the murderous tetrarch was inquiring about Him; wished to see Him; perhaps would send and demand his presence when he returned to his new palace, the Golden House of his new capital at Tiberias. For the mission of the Twelve had tended more than ever to spread a rumour of Him among the people, and speculation respecting Him was rife. All admitted that He had some high claim to attention. Some thought that He was Elijah, some Jeremiah, others one of the Prophets; but Herod had the most singular solution of the problem. It is said that when Theodoric had ordered the murder of Symmachus, he was haunted and finally maddened by the phantom of the old man's distorted features glaring at him from a dish on the table; nor can it have been otherwise with Herod Antipas. Into his banquet hall had been brought the head of one whom, in the depth of his inmost being, he felt to have been holy and just; and he had seen, with the solemn agony of death still resting on them, the stern features on which he had often gazed with awe. Did no reproach issue from those dead lips yet louder and more terrible than they had spoken in life? were the accents which had uttered, "It is not lawful for thee to have her," frozen into silence, or did they seem to issue with supernatural energy from the mute ghastliness of death? If we mistake not, that dissevered head was rarely thenceforth absent from Herod's haunted imagination from that day forward till he lay upon his dying bed. And now, when but a brief time afterwards, he heard of the fame of another Prophet—of a Prophet transcendently mightier, and one who wrought miracles, which John had *never* done—his guilty conscience shivered with superstitious dread, and to his intimates he began to whisper with horror, "*This is John the Baptist whom I beheaded: he is risen from the dead, and therefore these mighty works are wrought by him.*" Had John sprung to life again thus suddenly to inflict a signal vengeance? would he come to the strong towers of

Machærus at the head of a multitude in wild revolt? or glide through the gilded halls of Julias or Tiberias, terrible, at midnight, with ghostly tread? “Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?”

As the imperious and violent temper of Herodias was the constant scourge of her husband's peace, so her mad ambition was subsequently the direct cause of his ruin. When the Emperor Caius (Caligula) began to heap favours on Herod Agrippa I., Herodias, sick with envy and discontent, urged Antipas to sail with her to Rome and procure a share of the distinction which had thus been given to her brother. Above all, she was anxious that her husband should obtain the title of king, instead of continuing content with the humbler one of tetrarch. In vain did the timid and ease-loving Antipas point out to her the danger to which he might be exposed by such a request. She made his life so bitter to him by her importunity that, against his better judgment, he was forced to yield. The event justified his worst misgivings. No love reigned between the numerous uncles and nephews and half-brothers in the tangled family of Herod, and either out of policy or jealousy Agrippa not only discountenanced the schemes of his sister and uncle—though they had helped him in his own misfortunes—but actually sent his freedman Fortunatus to Rome to accuse Antipas of treasonable designs. The tetrarch failed to clear himself of the charge, and in A.D. 39 was banished to Lugdunum—probably St. Bertrand de Comminges, in Gaul, not far from the Spanish frontier. Herodias, either from choice or necessity or despair, accompanied his exile, and here they both died in obscurity and dishonour. Salome, the dancer—the Lucrezia Borgia of the Herodian house—disappears henceforth from history. Tradition or legend alone informs us that she met with an early, violent, and hideous death.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE FEEDING OF THE FIVE THOUSAND, AND WALKING ON THE SEA.

THE Feeding of the Five Thousand is one of the few miracles during the ministry of Christ which are narrated to us by all four of the Evangelists; and as it is placed by St. John after the nameless festival

and just before a Passover, and by the Synoptists in immediate connection with the return of the Twelve and the execution of the Baptist, we can hardly err in introducing it at this point of our narrative.

The novel journeyings of the Apostles, the agitation of His own recent conflicts, the burden of that dread intelligence which had just reached Him, the constant pressure of a fluctuating multitude which absorbed all their time, once more rendered it necessary that the little company should recover the tone and bloom of their spirits by a brief period of rest and solitude. "Come ye yourselves," He said, "apart into a desert place, and rest a while."

At the north-eastern corner of the Lake, a little beyond the point where the Jordan enters it, was a second Bethsaida, or "Fish-house," once, like its western namesake, a small village, but recently enlarged and beautified by Philip, tetrarch of Ituræa, and called, for the sake of distinction, Bethsaida Julias. The second name had been given it in honour of Julia, the beautiful but infamous daughter of the Emperor Augustus. These half-heathen Herodian cities, with their imitative Greek architecture and adulatory Roman names, seem to have repelled rather than attracted the feet of Christ; and though much of His work was accomplished in the neighbourhood of considerable cities, we know of no city except Jerusalem in which He ever taught. But to the south of Bethsaida Julias was the green and narrow plain of El Batiha, which, like the hills that close it round, was uninhabited then as now. Hitherward the little vessel steered its course, with its freight of weary and saddened hearts which sought repose. But private as the departure had been, it had not passed unobserved, and did not remain unknown. It is but six miles by sea from Capernaum to the retired and desolate shore which was their destination. The little vessel, evidently retarded by unfavourable winds, made its way slowly at no great distance from the shore, and by the time it reached its destination, the object which their Master's kindness had desired for His Apostles was completely frustrated. Some of the multitude had already outrun the vessel, and were thronging about the landing-place when the prow touched the pebbly shore; while in the distance were seen the thronging groups of Passover pilgrims, who were attracted out of their course by the increasing celebrity of this Unknown Prophet. Jesus was touched with compassion for them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd. We may conjecture from St. John that on reaching the

land He and His disciples climbed the hill-side, and there waited a short time till the whole multitude had assembled. Then descending among them He taught them many things, preaching to them of the kingdom of heaven, and healing their sick.

The day wore on; already the sun was sinking towards the western hills, yet still the multitude lingered, charmed by that healing voice and by those holy words. The evening would soon come, and after the brief Oriental twilight, the wandering crowd, who in their excitement had neglected even the necessities of life, would find themselves in the darkness, hungry and afar from every human habitation. The disciples began to be anxious lest the day should end in some unhappy catastrophe, which would give a fresh handle to the already embittered enemies of their Lord. But his compassion had already forestalled their considerate anxiety, and had suggested the difficulty to the mind of Philip. A little consultation took place. To buy even a mouthful apiece for such a multitude would require at least two hundred denarii (more than £7); and even supposing that they possessed such a sum in their common purse, there was now neither time nor opportunity to make the necessary purchases. Andrew hereupon mentioned that there was a little boy there who had five barley-loaves and two small fishes, but he only said it in a despairing way, and, as it were, to show the utter helplessness of the only suggestion which occurred to him.

“Make the men sit down,” was the brief reply.

Wondering and expectant, the Apostles bade the multitude recline, as for a meal, on the rich green grass which in that pleasant spring-time clothed the hill-sides. They arranged them in companies of fifty and a hundred, and as they sat in these orderly groups upon the grass, the gay red and blue and yellow colours of the clothing which the poorest Orientals wear called up in the imagination of St. Peter a multitude of flower-beds in some well-cultivated garden. And then, standing in the midst of His guests—glad-hearted at the work of mercy which He intended to perform—Jesus raised His eyes to heaven, gave thanks, blessed the loaves, broke them into pieces, and began to distribute them to His disciples, and they to the multitude; and the two fishes He divided among them all. It was a humble but a sufficient, and to hungry wayfarers a delicious meal. And when all were abundantly satisfied, Jesus, not only to show His disciples the extent and reality of what had been done, but also to teach them the memorable lesson that wastefulness, even of miraculous power, is wholly alien to

the Divine economy, bade them gather up the fragments that remained, that nothing might be lost. The symmetrical arrangement of the multitude showed that about five thousand men, besides women and children, had been fed, and yet twelve baskets were filled with what was over and above to them that had eaten.

The miracle produced a profound impression. It was exactly in accordance with the current expectation, and the multitude began to whisper to each other that this must undoubtedly be "that Prophet which should come into the world;" the Shiloh of Jacob's blessing; the Star and the Sceptre of Balaam's vision; the Prophet like unto Moses to whom they were to hearken; perhaps the Elijah promised by the dying breath of ancient prophecy; perhaps the Jeremiah of their tradition, come back to reveal the hiding-place of the Ark, and the Urim, and the sacred fire. Jesus marked their undisguised admiration, and the danger that their enthusiasm might break out by force, and precipitate His death by open rebellion against the Roman government in the attempt to make Him a king. He saw too that His disciples seemed to share this worldly and perilous excitement. The time was come, therefore, for instant action. By the exercise of direct authority, He compelled His disciples to embark in their boat, and cross the Lake before Him in the direction of Capernaum or the western Bethsaida. A little gentle constraint was necessary, for they were naturally unwilling to leave Him among the excited multitude on that lonely shore, and if anything great was going to happen to Him they felt a right to be present. On the other hand, it was more easy for Him to dismiss the multitude when they had seen that His own immediate friends and disciples had been sent away.

So in the gathering dusk He gradually and gently succeeded in persuading the multitude to leave Him, and when all but the most enthusiastic had streamed away to their homes or caravans, He suddenly left the rest, and fled from them to the hill-top alone to pray. He was conscious that a solemn and awful crisis of His day on earth was come, and by communing with His heavenly Father, He would nerve His soul for the stern work of the morrow, and the bitter conflict of many coming weeks. Once before He had spent in the mountain solitudes a night of lonely prayer, but then it was before the choice of His beloved Apostles, and the glad tidings of His earliest and happiest ministry. Far different were the feelings with which the Great High Priest now climbed the rocky stairs of that great mountain altar which in His temple of the night seemed to lift Him nearer to the stars of

God. The murder of His beloved forerunner brought home to His soul more nearly the thought of death ; nor was He deceived by this brief blaze of a falsely-founded popularity, which on the next day He meant to quench. The storm which now began to sweep over the barren hills ; the winds that rushed howling down the ravines ; the Lake before Him buffeted into tempestuous foam ; the little boat which—as the moonlight struggled through the rifted clouds—He saw tossing beneath Him on the labouring waves, were all too sure an emblem of the altered aspects of His earthly life. But there on the desolate hill-top, in that night of storm, He could gain strength and peace and happiness unspeakable ; for there He was alone with God. And so over that figure, bowed in lonely prayer upon the hills, and over those toilers upon the troubled lake, the darkness fell and the great winds blew.

Hour after hour passed by. It was now the fourth watch of the night ; the ship had traversed but half of its destined course ; it was dark, and the wind was contrary and the waves boisterous, and they were distressed with toiling at the oar, and above all there was no one with them now to calm and save, for Jesus was alone upon the land. Alone upon the land and they were tossing on the perilous sea ; but all the while He saw and pitied them, and at last, in their worst extremity, they saw a gleam in the darkness, and an awful figure, and a fluttering robe, and One drew near them, treading upon the ridges of the sea, but seemed as if He meant to pass them by ; and they cried out in terror at the sight, thinking that it was a phantom that walked upon the waves. And through the storm and darkness to them—as so often to us, when, amid the darkneses of life, the ocean seems so great, and our little boats so small—there thrilled that Voice of peace, which said, “It is I : be not afraid.”

That Voice stilled their terrors, and at once they were eager to receive Him into the ship ; but Peter’s impetuous love—the strong yearning of him who, in his despairing self-consciousness, had cried out “Depart from me !”—now cannot even await His approach, and he passionately exclaims—

“Lord, if it be Thou, bid me come unto Thee on the water.”

“Come !”

And over the vessel’s side into the troubled waves he sprang, and while his eye was fixed on his Lord, the wind might toss his hair, and the spray might drench his robes, but all was well ; but when, with wavering faith, he glanced from Him to the furious waves, and

to the gulfy blackness underneath, then he began to sink, and in an accent of despair—how unlike his former confidence!—he faintly cried, “Lord, save me!” Nor did Jesus fail. Instantly, with a smile of pity, He stretched out His hand, and grasped the hand of His drowning disciple with the gentle rebuke, “O thou of little faith, why didst thou doubt?” And so, his love satisfied, but his over-confidence rebuked, they climbed—the Lord and His abashed Apostle—into the boat; and the wind lulled, and amid the ripple of waves upon a moonlit shore, they were at the haven where they would be; and all—the crew as well as His disciples—were filled with deeper and deeper amazement, and some of them, addressing Him by a title which Nathanael alone had applied to Him before, exclaimed, “Truly Thou art the Son of God.”

Let us pause a moment longer over this wonderful narrative, perhaps of all others the most difficult for our feeble faith to believe or understand. Some have tried in various methods to explain away its miraculous character; they have laboured to show that *ἐπὶ τὴν θάλασσαν* may mean no more than that Jesus walked along the shore parallel to the vessel; or even that, in the darkness, the Apostles may have thought at first that He was, or had been, walking upon the sea. Such subterfuges are idle and superfluous. If any man find himself unable to believe in miracles—if he even think it wrong to try and acquire the faith which accepts them—then let him be thoroughly convinced in his own mind, and cling honestly to the truth as he conceives it.

It is not for us, or for any man, to judge another: to his own Master he standeth or falleth. But let him not attempt to foist such disbelief into the plain narrative of the Evangelists. That *they intended* to describe an amazing miracle is indisputable to any one who carefully reads their words; and, as I have said before, if, believing in God, we believe in a Divine Providence over the lives of men—and, believing in that Divine Providence, believe in the miraculous—and, believing in the miraculous, accept as truth the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ—and, believing that resurrection, believe that He was indeed the Son of God—then, however deeply we may realise the beauty and the wonder and the power of natural laws, we realise yet more deeply the power of Him who holds those laws, and all which they have evolved, in the hollow of His hand; and to us the miraculous, when thus attested, will be in no way more stupendous than the natural, nor shall we find it an impossible conception that He who

sent His Son to earth to die for us should have put all authority into His hand.

So then if, like Peter, we fix our eyes on Jesus, we too may walk triumphantly over the swelling waves of disbelief, and unterrified amid the rising winds of doubt; but if we turn away our eyes from Him in whom we have believed—if, as it is so easy to do, and as we are so much tempted to do, we look rather at the power and fury of those terrible and destructive elements than at Him who can help and save—then we too shall inevitably sink. Oh, if we feel, often and often, that the water-floods threaten to drown us, and the deep to swallow up the tossed vessel of our Church and Faith, may it again and again be granted us to hear amid the storm and the darkness, and the voices prophesying war, those two sweetest of the Saviour's utterances—

“Fear not. Only believe.”

“It is I. Be not afraid.”

Stop and take lesson test.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE DISCOURSE AT CAPERNAUM.

THE dawn of that day broke on one of the saddest episodes of our Saviour's life. It was the day in the synagogue at Capernaum on which he deliberately scattered the mists and exhalations of such spurious popularity as the Miracle of the Loaves had gathered about His person and His work, and put not only His idle followers, but some even of His nearer disciples, to a test under which their love for Him entirely failed. That discourse in the synagogue forms a marked crisis in His career. It was followed by manifestations of surprised dislike, which were as the first muttering of that storm of hatred and persecution which was henceforth to burst over His head.

We have seen already that some of the multitude, filled with vague wonder and insatiable curiosity, had lingered on the little plain by Bethsaida Julias that they might follow the movements of Jesus, and share in the blessings and triumphs of which they expected an immediate manifestation. They had seen Him dismiss His disciples, and had perhaps caught glimpses of Him as He climbed the hill alone;