LESSON TWENTY-FOUR

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE RAISING OF LAZARUS.

THESE farewell interviews and teachings perhaps belong to the two days after Jesus—while still in the Peræan Bethany—had received from the other Bethany, where he had so often found a home, the solemn message that "he whom He loved was sick." Lazarus was the one intimate personal friend whom Jesus possessed outside the circle of His Apostles, and the urgent message was evidently an appeal for the presence of Him in whose presence, so far as we know, there had never been a death-bed scene.

But Jesus did not come. He contented Himself—occupied as He was in important works—with sending them the message that "this sickness was not to death, but for the glory of God," and stayed two days longer where He was. And at the end of those two days He said to His disciples, "Let us go into Judæa again." The disciples reminded him how lately the Jews had there sought to stone Him, and asked Him how he could venture to go there again; but His answer was that during the twelve hours of His day of work He could walk in safety, for the light of His duty, which was the will of His Heavenly Father, would keep Him from danger. And then He told them that Lazarus slept, and that He was going to wake him out of sleep. Three of them at least must have remembered how, on another memorable occasion, He had spoken of death as sleep; but either they were silent, and others spoke, or they were too slow of heart to remember it. As they understood Him to speak of natural sleep, He had to tell them plainly that Lazarus was dead, and that He was glad of it for their sakes, for that He would go to restore Him to life. "Let us also go," said the affectionate but ever-despondent Thomas, "that we may die with Him"—as though he had said, "It is all a useless and perilous scheme, but still let us go."

Starting early in the morning, Jesus could easily have accomplished the distance—some twenty miles—before sunset. But, on His arrival, he stayed outside the little village. Its vicinity to Jerusalem, from which it is not two miles distant, and the evident wealth and position of the family, had attracted a large concourse of distinguished Jews to console and mourn with the sisters; and it was obviously desirable to act with caution in venturing among such

determined enemies. But while Mary, true to her retiring and contemplative disposition, was sitting in the house, unconscious of her Lord's approach, the more active Martha had received intelligence that he was near at hand, and immediately went forth to meet Him. Lazarus had died on the very day that Jesus received the message of his illness; two days had elapsed while he lingered in Peræa, a fourth had been spent on the journey. Martha could not understand this sad delay. "Lord," she said, in tones gently reproachful, "if Thou hadst been here my brother had not died," yet "even now" she seems to indulge the vague hope that some alleviation may be vouchsafed to their bereavement. The few words which follow are words of most memorable import—a declaration of Jesus which has brought comfort not to Martha only, but to millions since, and which shall do to millions more unto the world's end—

"Thy brother shall rise again."

Martha evidently had not dreamt that he would now be awaked from the sleep of death, and she could only answer, "I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

Jesus said unto her, "I AM THE RESURRECTION AND THE LIFE: HE THAT BELIEVETH ON ME, THOUGH HE HAVE DIED, SHALL LIVE; AND HE THAT LIVETH AND BELIEVETH ON ME SHALL NEVER DIE. Believest thou this?"

It was not for a spirit like Martha's to distinguish the interchanging thoughts of physical and spiritual death which were united in that deep utterance; but without pausing to fathom it, her faithful love supplied the answer, "Yea, Lord, I believe that Thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world."

Having uttered that great confession, she at once went in quest of her sister, about whom Jesus had already inquired, and whose heart and intellect, as Martha seemed instinctively to feel, were better adapted to embrace such lofty truths. She found Mary in the house, and both the secrecy with which she delivered her message, and the haste and silence with which Mary arose to go and meet her Lord, show that precaution was needed, and that the visit of Jesus had not been unaccompanied with danger. The Jews who were comforting her, and whom she had thus suddenly left, rose to follow her to the tomb whither they thought that she had gone to weep; but they soon saw the real object of her movement. Outside the village they found Jesus surrounded by His friends, and they saw Mary hurry up to Him, and fling herself at His feet with the same agonising reproach which her sister also had used, "Lord, if Thou hadst been here my brother

had not died." The greater intensity of her emotion spoke in her fewer words and her greater self-abandonment of anguish, and she could add no more. It may be that her affection was too deep to permit her hope to be so sanguine as that of her sister; it may be that with humbler reverence she left all to her Lord. The sight of all that love and misery, the pitiable spectacle of human bereavement, the utter futility at such a moment of human consolation, the shrill commingling of a hired and simulated lamentation with all this genuine anguish, the unspoken reproach, "Oh, why didst Thou not come at once and snatch the victim from the enemy, and spare Thy friend from the sting of death, and us from the more bitter sting of such a parting?"—all these influences touched the tender compassion of Jesus with deep emotion. A strong effort of self-repression was needed—an effort which shook his whole frame with a powerful shudder—before He could find words to speak, and then He could merely ask, "Where have ye laid him?" They said, "Lord, come and see." As He followed them His eyes were streaming with silent tears. His tears were not unnoticed, and while some of the Jews observed with respectful sympathy this proof of His affection for the dead, others were asking dubiously, perhaps almost sneeringly, whether He who had opened the eyes of the blind could not have saved His friend from death? They had not heard how, in the far-off village of Galilee, he had raised the dead; but they knew that in Jerusalem He had opened the eyes of one born blind, and that seemed to them a miracle no less stupendous. But Jesus knew and heard their comments, and once more the whole scene—its genuine sorrows, its hired mourners, its uncalmed hatreds, all concentrated around the ghastly work of death—came so powerfully over His spirit, that, though He knew that He was going to wake the dead, once more His whole being was swept by a storm of emotion. The grave, like most of the graves belonging to the wealthier Jews, was a recess hewn horizontally in the rock with a slab or mass of stone to close the entrance. Jesus bade them remove this *gôlal*, as it was called. Then Martha interposed—partly from conviction that the soul had now utterly departed from the vicinity of the mouldering body, partly afraid in her natural delicacy of the shocking spectacle which the removal of that stone would reveal. For in that hot climate it is necessary that burial should follow immediately upon death, and as it was the evening of the fourth day since Lazarus had died, there was too much reason to fear that by this time decomposition had set in. Solemnly Jesus reminded her of His promise,

and the stone was moved from the place where the dead was laid. He stood at the entrance, and all others shrank a little backward, with their eyes still fixed on that dark and silent cave. A hush fell upon them all as Jesus raised His eyes and thanked God for the coming confirmation of His prayer. And then, raising to its clearest tones that voice of awful and sonorous authority, and uttering, as was usual with him on such occasions, the briefest words, He cried, "LAZARUS, COME FORTH!" Those words thrilled once more through that region of impenetrable darkness which separates us from the world to come; and scarcely were they spoken when, like a spectre, from the rocky tomb issued a figure swathed indeed in its white and ghastly cerements—with the napkin round the head which had upheld the jaw that four days previously had dropped in death, bound hand and foot and face, but not livid, not horrible—the figure of a youth with the healthy blood of a restored life flowing through his veins; of a youth restored—so tradition tells us—for thirty more long years to life, and light, and love.

Let us pause here to answer the not unnatural question as to the silence of the Synoptists respecting this great miracle. To treat the subject fully would indeed be to write a long disquisition on the structure of the Gospels; and after all we could assign no *final* explanation of the obvious difficulties. The Gospels are, of their very nature, confessedly and designedly fragmentary, and it may be regarded as all but certain that the first three were mainly derived from a common oral tradition, or founded on one or two original, and themselves fragmentary, documents. The Synoptists almost confine themselves to the Galilæan, and St. John to the Judæan ministry, though the Synoptists distinctly allude to and presuppose the ministry in Jerusalem, and St. John the ministry in Galilee. Not one of the four Evangelists proposes for a moment to give an exhaustive account, or even catalogue of the parables, discourses, and miracles of Jesus; nor was it the object of either of them to write a complete narrative of His three and a-half years of public life. Each of them relates the incidents which came most immediately within his own scope, and were best known to him either by personal witness, by isolated written documents, or by oral tradition; and each of them tells enough to show that He was the Christ, the Son of the Living God, the Saviour of the world. Now, since the raising of Lazarus would not seem to them a greater exercise of miraculous power than others which they had recorded (John xi. 37)—since, as has well been said, no *semeiometer* had been then invented

to test the relative greatness of miracles—and since this miracle fell within the Judæan cycle—it does not seem at all *more* inexplicable that they should have omitted this, than that they should have omitted the miracle at Bethesda, or the opening of the eyes of him who had been born blind. But further than this, we seem to trace in the Synoptists a special reticence about the family at Bethany. The house in which they take a prominent position is called "the house of Simon the leper;" Mary is called simply "a woman" by St. Matthew and St. Mark (Matt. xxvi. 6, 7; Mark xiv. 3); and St. Luke contents himself with calling Bethany "a certain village" (Luke x. 38), although he was perfectly aware of the name (Luke xix. 29). There is, therefore, a distinct argument for the conjecture that when the earliest form of the Gospel of St. Matthew appeared, and when the memorials were collected which were used by the other two Synoptists, there may have been special reasons for not recording a miracle which would have brought into dangerous prominence a man who was still living, but of whom the Jews had sought to get rid as a witness of Christ's wonder-working power (John xii. 10). Even if this danger had ceased, it would have been obviously repulsive to the quiet family of Bethany to have been made the focus of an intense and irreverent curiosity, and to be questioned about those hidden things which none have ever revealed. Something, then, seems to have "sealed the lips" of those Evangelists—an obstacle which had been long removed when St. John's Gospel first saw the light.

"If they believe not Moses and the Prophets"—so ran the answer of Abraham to Dives in the parable—"neither will they be converted though one (and this, too, a Lazarus!) rose from the dead." It was even so. There were many witnesses of this miracle who believed when they saw it, but there were others who could only carry an angry and alarmed account of it to the Sanhedrin at Jerusalem.

The Sanhedrin met in a spirit of hatred and perplexity. They *could* not deny the miracle; they *would* not believe on Him who had performed it; they could only dread His growing influence and conjecture that it would be used to make Himself a king, and so end in Roman intervention and the annihilation of their political existence. And as they vainly raged in impotent counsels, Joseph Caiaphas rose to address them. He was the civil High Priest, and held the office eleven years, from A.D. 25, when Valerius Gratus placed him in it, till A.D. 36, when Vitellius turned him out. A large share indeed of the honour which belonged to his position had been transferred to

Ananus, Annas—or to give him his true Jewish name, Hanan—who had simply been deprived of the High Priesthood by Roman authority, and who (as we shall see hereafter) was perhaps the *Nasî* or *Sagan*, and was, at any rate, regarded as being the real High Priest by the stricter Jews. Caiaphas, however, was at this time nominally and ostensibly High Priest. As such he was supposed to have that gift of prophecy which was still believed to linger faintly in the persons of the descendants of Aaron, after the total disappearance of dreams, Urim, omens, prophets, and *Bath Kôl*, which, in descending degrees, had been the ordinary means of ascertaining the will of God. And thus when Caiaphas rose, and with shameless avowal of a policy most flagitiously selfish and unjust, haughtily told the Sanhedrin that all their proposals were mere ignorance, and that the only thing to be done was to sacrifice one victim—innocent or guilty he did not stop to inquire or to define—one victim for the whole people—ay, and St. John adds, not for that nation only, but for all God's children scattered throughout the world—they accepted unhesitatingly that voice of unconscious prophecy. And by accepting it they filled to the brim the cup of their iniquity, and incurred the crime which drew upon their guilty heads the very catastrophe which it was committed to avert. It was this Moloch worship of worse than human sacrifice which, as in the days of Manasseh, doomed them to a second and a more terrible, and a more enduring, destruction. There were some, indeed, who were not to be found on that Hill of Evil Counsel, or who, if present, consented not to the counsel or will of them; but from that day forth the secret fiat had been issued that Jesus must be put to death. Henceforth He was living with a price upon His head.

And that fiat, however originally secret, became instantly known. Jesus was not ignorant of it; and for the last few weeks of His earthly existence, till the due time had brought round the Passover at which He meant to lay down His life, He retired in secret to a little obscure city, near the wilderness, called Ephraim. There, safe from all the tumults and machinations of His deadly enemies, He spent calmly and happily those last few weeks of rest, surrounded only by His disciples, and training them, in that peaceful seclusion, for the mighty work of thrusting their sickles into the ripening harvests of the world. None, or few beside that faithful band, knew of His hiding-place; for the Pharisees, when they found themselves unable to conceal their designs, had published an order that if any man knew where He was,

he was to reveal it, that they might seize Him, if necessary even by violence, and execute the decision at which they had arrived. But, as yet, the bribe had no effect.

How long this deep and much-imperilled retirement lasted we are not told, nor can we lift the veil of silence that has fallen over its records. If the decision at which the *Beth Dîn* in the house of Caiaphas had arrived was regarded as a formal sentence of death, then it is not impossible that these scrupulous legists may have suffered forty days to elapse for the production of witnesses in favour of the accused. But it is very doubtful whether the destruction intended for Jesus was not meant to be carried out in a manner more secret and more summary, bearing the aspect rather of a violent assassination than of a legal judgment.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

JERICHO AND BETHANY.

From the conical hill of Ephraim Jesus could see the pilgrim bands as, at the approach of the Passover, they began to stream down the Jordan valley towards Jerusalem, to purify themselves from every ceremonial defilement before the commencement of the Great Feast. The time had come for Him to leave His hiding-place, and He descended from Ephraim to the high road in order to join the great caravan of Galilæan pilgrims.

And as He turned His back on the little town, and began the journey which was to end at Jerusalem, a prophetic solemnity and elevation of soul struggling with the natural anguish of the flesh, which shrank from that great sacrifice, pervaded His whole being, and gave a new and strange grandeur to every gesture and every look. It was the Transfiguration of Self-sacrifice; and, like that previous Transfiguration of Glory, it filled those who beheld it with an amazement and terror which they could not explain. There are few pictures in the Gospel more striking than this of Jesus going forth to His death, and walking alone along the path into the deep valley, while behind Him, in awful reverence, and mingled anticipations of dread

and hope—their eyes fixed on Him, as with bowed head He preceded them in all the majesty of sorrow—the disciples walked behind and dared not disturb His meditations. But at last He paused and beckoned them to Him, and then, once more—for the third time—with fuller, clearer, more startling, more terrible particulars than ever before, He told them that he should be betrayed to the Priests and Scribes; by them condemned; then handed over to the Gentiles; by the Gentiles mocked, scourged, and—He now for the first time revealed to them, without any ambiguity, the crowning horror—*crucified;* and that, on the third day, He should rise again. But their minds were full of Messianic hopes; they were so pre-occupied with the conviction that now the kingdom of God was to come in all its splendour that the prophecy passed by them like the idle wind; they could not, and would not, understand.

There can be no more striking comment on their inability to realise the meaning of what Jesus had said to them, than the fact that very shortly after, and during the same journey, occurred the ill-timed and strangely unspiritual request which the Evangelists proceed to record. With an air of privacy and mystery, Salome, one of the constant attendants of Jesus, with her two sons, James and John, who were among the most eminent of His Apostles, came to Him with adorations, and begged Him to promise them a favour. He asked what they wished; and then the mother, speaking for her fervent-hearted ambitious sons, begged that in His kingdom they might sit, the one at His right hand, and the other at His left. Jesus bore gently with their selfishness and error. They had asked in their blindness for that position which, but a few days afterwards, they were to see occupied in shame and anguish by the two crucified robbers. Their imaginations were haunted by twelve thrones; His thoughts were of three crosses. They dreamt of earthly crowns; He told them of a cup of bitterness and a baptism of blood. Could they indeed drink with Him of that cup, and be baptised with that baptism? Understanding perhaps more of His meaning now, they yet boldly answered, "We can;" and then He told them that they indeed *should* do so, but that to sit on His right hand and on His left was reserved for those for whom it had been prepared by His Heavenly Father. The throne, says Basil, "is the price of toils, not a grace granted to ambition; a reward of righteousness, not the concession of a request."

The ten, when they heard the incident, were naturally indignant at this secret attempt of the two brothers to secure for themselves a pre-

eminence of honour; little knowing that, so far as earth was concerned —and of this alone they dreamt—that premium of honour should only be, for the one a precedence in martyrdom, for the other a prolongation of suffering. This would be revealed to them in due time, but even now Jesus called them all together, and taught them, as He had so often taught them, that the highest honour is won by the deepest humility. The shadowy principalities of earth were characterised by the semblance of a little brief authority over their fellow-men; it was natural for them to lord it, and tyrannise it over their fellows: but in the kingdom of heaven the lord of all should be the servant of all, even as the highest Lord had spent His very life in the lowest ministrations, and was about to give it as a ransom for many.

As they advanced towards Jericho, through the scorched and treeless Ghôr, the crowd of attendant pilgrims grew more and more dense about Him. It was either the evening of Thursday, Nisan 7, or the morning of Friday, Nisan 8, when they reached the environs of that famous city—the city of fragrance, the city of roses, the city of palm-trees, the "paradise of God." It is now a miserable and degraded Arab village, but was then a prosperous and populous town, standing on a green and flowery oasis, rich in honey and leaf-honey, and myrobalanum, and well watered by the Fountain of Elisha and by other abundant springs. Somewhere in the vicinity of the town sat blind Bartimæus, the son of Timæus, begging with a companion of his misery; and as they heard the noise of the passing multitude, and were told that it was Jesus of Nazareth who was passing by, they raised their voices in the cry, "Jesus, Thou Son of David, have mercy on us." The multitude resented this loud clamour as unworthy of the majesty of Him who was now to enter Jerusalem as the Messiah of His nation. But Jesus heard the cry, and His compassionate heart was touched. He stood still, and ordered them to be called to Him. Then the obsequious throng alter their tone, and say to Bartimæus, who is so much the more prominent in the narrative that two of the Synoptists do not even mention his companion at all—'Be of good cheer; rise, He calleth thee." With a burst of hasty joy, flinging away his *abba*, he leaped up, and was led to Jesus. "What willest thou that I should do for thee?" "Rabboni," he answered (giving Jesus the most reverential title that he knew), "that I may recover my sight." "Go," said Jesus, "thy faith hath saved thee." He touched the eyes both of him and of his companion, and with recovered sight they followed among the rejoicing multitudes, glorifying God.

It was necessary to rest at Jericho before entering on the dangerous, rocky, robber-haunted gorge which led from it to Jerusalem, and formed a rough, almost continuous, ascent of six hours, from 600 feet below to nearly 3,000 feet above the level of the Mediterranean. The two most distinctive classes of Jericho were priests and publicans; and, as it was a priestly city, it might naturally have been expected that the King, the Son of David, the successor of Moses, would be received in the house of some descendant of Aaron. But the place where Jesus chose to rest was determined by other circumstances. A colony of publicans was established in the city to secure the revenues accruing from the large traffic in a kind of balsam, which grew more luxuriantly there than in any other place, and to regulate the exports and imports between the Roman province and the dominions of Herod Antipas. One of the chiefs of these publicans was a man named Zacchæus, doubly odious to the people, as being a Jew and as exercising his functions so near to the Holy City. His official rank would increase his unpopularity, because the Jews would regard it as due to exceptional activity in the service of their Roman oppressors, and they would look upon his wealth as a probable indication of numerous extortions. This man had a deep desire to see with his own eyes what kind of person Jesus was; but being short of stature, he was unable, in the dense crowd, to catch a glimpse of Him. He therefore ran forward, as Jesus was passing through the town, and climbed the low branches of an Egyptian fig, which overshadowed the road. Under this tree Jesus would pass, and the publican would have ample opportunity of seeing one who, alone of His nation, not only showed no concentrated and fanatical hatred for the class to which he belonged, but had found among publicans His most eager listeners, and had elevated one of them into the rank of an Apostle. Zacchæus saw Him as He approached, and how must his heart have beat with joy and gratitude, when the great Prophet, the avowed Messiah of His nation, paused under the tree, looked up, and, calling him by his name, bade him hasten and come down, because He intended to be a guest in his house. Zacchæus should not only see Him, but He would come in and sup with him, and make His abode with him—the glorious Messiah a guest of the execrated publican. With undisguised joy Zacchæus eagerly hastened down from the boughs of the "sycamore," and led the way to his house. But the murmurs of the multitude were long, and loud, and unanimous. They thought it impolitic, incongruous, reprehensible, that the King, in the very midst

of His impassioned followers, should put up at the house of a man whose profession was a symbol of the national degradation, and who even in that profession was, as they openly implied, disreputable. But the approving smile, the gracious word of Jesus was more to Zacchæus than all the murmurs and insults of the crowd. Jesus did not despise him: what mattered then the contempt of the multitude? Nay, Jesus had done him honour; therefore he would honour, he would respect himself. As all that was base in him would have been driven into defiance by contempt and hatred, so all that was noble was evoked by a considerate tenderness. He would strive to be worthy, at least *more* worthy, of his glorious guest; he would at least do his utmost to disgrace Him less. And, therefore, standing prominently forth among the throng, he uttered—not to *them*, for they despised him, and for them he cared not, but to his Lord—the vow which, by one high act of magnanimity, at once attested his penitence and sealed his forgiveness. "Behold the half of my goods, Lord, I hereby give to the poor; and whatever fraudulent gain I ever made from any one, I now restore fourfold." This great sacrifice of that which had hitherto been dearest to him, this fullest possible restitution of every gain he had ever gotten dishonestly, this public confession and public restitution, should be a pledge to his Lord that His grace had not been in vain. Thus did love unseal by a single touch those swelling fountains of penitence which contempt would have kept closed for ever! No incident of His triumphal procession could have given to our Lord a deeper and holier joy. Was it not His very mission to seek and save the lost? Looking on the publican, thus ennobled by that instant renunciation of the fruits of sin, which is the truest test of a genuine repentance, He said, "Now is salvation come to this house, since he too is"—in the true spiritual sense, not in the idle, boastful, material sense alone—"a son of Abraham."

To show them how mistaken were the expectations with which they were now excited—how erroneous, for instance, were the principles on which they had just been condemning Him for using the hospitality of Zacchæus—He proceeded (either at the meal in the publican's house, or more probably when they had again started) to tell them the Parable of the Pounds. Adopting incidents with which the history of the Herodian family had made them familiar, He told them of a nobleman who had travelled into a far country to receive a kingdom, and had delivered to each of his servants a *mina* to be profitably employed till his return; the citizens hated him,

and sent an embassy after him to procure his rejection. But in spite of this his kingdom was confirmed, and he came back to punish his enemies, and to reward his servants in proportion to their fidelity. One faithless servant, instead of using the sum entrusted to him, had hidden it in a napkin, and returned it with an unjust and insolent complaint of his master's severity. This man was deprived of his pound, which was given to the most deserving of the good and faithful servants; these were magnificently rewarded, while the rebellious citizens were brought forth and slain. The parable was one of many-sided application; it indicated His near departure from the world; the hatred which should reject Him; the duty of faithfulness in the use of all that He entrusted to them; the uncertainty of His return; the certainty that, when He did return, there would be a solemn account; the condemnation of the slothful; the splendid reward of all who should serve Him well; the utter destruction of those who endeavoured to reject His power. Probably while He delivered this parable the caravan had paused, and the pilgrims had crowded round Him. Leaving them to meditate on its significance, He once more moved forward alone at the head of the long and marvelling procession. They fell reverently back, and followed Him with many a look of awe as He slowly climbed the long, sultry, barren gorge which led up to Jerusalem from Jericho.

He did not mean to make the city of Jerusalem His actual resting-place, but preferred as usual to stay in the loved home at Bethany. Thither He arrived on the evening of Friday, Nisan 8, A.U.C. 780 (March 31, A.D. 30), six days before the Passover, and before the sunset had commenced the Sabbath hours. Here He would part from His train of pilgrims, some of whom would go to enjoy the hospitality of their friends in the city, and others, as they do at the present day, would run up for themselves rude tents and booths in the valley of the Kedron, and about the western slopes of the Mount of Olives.

The Sabbath day was spent in quiet, and in the evening they made Him a supper. St. Matthew and St. Mark say, a little mysteriously, that this feast was given in the house of Simon the leper. St. John makes no mention whatever of Simon the leper, a name which does not occur elsewhere; and it is clear from his narrative that the family of Bethany were in all respects the central figures at this entertainment. Martha seems to have had the entire supervision of the feast, and the risen Lazarus was almost as much an object of curiosity as Jesus Himself. In short, so many thronged to see Lazarus

—for the family was one of good position, and its members were widely known and beloved—that the notorious and indisputable miracle which had been performed on his behalf caused many to believe on Jesus. This so exasperated the ruling party at Jerusalem that, in their wicked desperation, they actually held a consultation how they might get rid of this living witness to the supernatural powers of the Messiah whom they rejected. Now since the raising of Lazarus was so intimately connected with the entire cycle of events which the earlier Evangelists so minutely record, we are again driven to the conclusion that there must have been some good reason, a reason which we can but uncertainly conjecture, for their marked reticence on this subject; and we find another trace of this reticence in their calling Mary "a certain woman," in their omission of all allusion to Martha and Lazarus, and in their telling us that this memorable banquet was served in the house of "Simon the leper." Who then was this Simon the leper? That he was no longer a leper is of course certain, for otherwise he could not have been living in his own house, or mingling in general society. Had he then been cleansed by Jesus? and, if so, was this one cause of the profound belief in Him which prevailed in that little household, and of the tender affection with which they always welcomed Him? or, again, was Simon now dead? We cannot answer these questions, nor are there sufficient data to enable us to decide whether he was the father of Martha and Mary and Lazarus, or, as some have conjectured, whether Martha was his widow, and the inheritress of his house.

Be this as it may, the feast was chiefly memorable, not for the number of Jews who thronged to witness it, and so to gaze at once on the Prophet of Nazareth and on the man whom He had raised from the dead, but from one memorable incident which occurred in the course of it, and which was the immediate beginning of the dark and dreadful end.

For as she sat there in the presence of her beloved and rescued brother, and her yet more deeply worshipped Lord, the feelings of Mary could no longer be restrained. She was not occupied like her sister in the active ministrations of the feast, but she sat and thought and gazed until the fire burned, and she felt impelled to some outward sign of her love, her gratitude, her adoration. So she arose and fetched an alabaster vase of Indian spikenard, and came softly behind Jesus where He sat, and broke the alabaster in her hands, and poured the genuine precious perfume first over His head, then over His feet, and

then—unconscious of every presence save His alone—she wiped those feet with the long tresses of her hair, while the atmosphere of the whole house was filled with the delicious fragrance. It was an act of devoted sacrifice, of exquisite self-abandonment; and the poor Galilæans who followed Jesus, so little accustomed to any luxury, so fully alive to the costly nature of the gift, might well have been amazed that it should have all been lavished on the rich luxury of one brief moment. None but the most spiritual-hearted there could feel that the delicate odour which breathed through the perfumed house might be to God a sweet-smelling savour; that even this was infinitely too little to satisfy the love of her who gave, or the dignity of Him to whom the gift was given.

But there was one present to whom on every ground the act was odious and repulsive. There is no vice at once so absorbing, so unreasonable, and so degrading as the vice of avarice, and avarice was the besetting sin in the dark soul of the traitor Judas. The failure to struggle with his own temptations; the disappointment of every expectation which had first drawn him to Jesus; the intolerable rebuke conveyed to his whole being by the daily communion with a sinless purity; the darker shadow which he could not but feel that his guilt flung athwart his footsteps because of the burning sunlight in which for many months he now had walked; the sense too that the eye of his Master, possibly even the eyes of some of his fellow-apostles, had read or were beginning to read the hidden secrets of his heart;—all these things had gradually deepened from an incipient alienation into an insatiable repugnancy and hate. And the sight of Mary's lavish sacrifice, the consciousness that it was now too late to save that large sum for the bag—the mere possession of which, apart from the sums which he could pilfer out of it, gratified his greed for gold—filled him with disgust and madness. He had a devil. He felt as if he had been personally cheated; as if the money were by right *his*, and he had been, in a senseless manner, defrauded of it. "To what purpose is this waste?" he indignantly said; and, alas! how often have his words been echoed, for wherever there is an act of splendid self-forgetfulness there is always a Judas to sneer and murmur at it. "This ointment might have been sold for three hundred pence and given to the poor!" *Three hundred pence*—ten pounds or more! There was perfect frenzy in the thought of such utter perdition of good money; why, for barely a third of such a sum, this son of perdition was ready to sell his Lord. Mary thought it not good enough to anele Christ's

sacred feet: Judas thought a third part of it sufficient reward for selling His very life.

That little touch about its "being given to the poor" is a very instructive one. It was probably the veil used by Judas to half conceal even from himself the grossness of his own motives—the fact that he was a petty thief, and really wished the charge of this money because it would have enabled him to add to his own private store. People rarely sin under the full glare of self-consciousness; they usually blind themselves with false pretexts and specious motives; and though Judas could not conceal his baseness from the clearer eye of John, he probably concealed it from himself under the notion that he really was protesting against an act of romantic wastefulness, and pleading the cause of disinterested charity.

But Jesus would not permit the contagion of this worldly indignation—which had already infected some of the simple disciples—to spread any farther; nor would he allow Mary, already the centre of an unfavourable observation which pained and troubled her, to suffer any more from the consequences of her noble act. "Why trouble ye the woman?" He said. "Let her alone; she wrought a good work upon Me; for ye have the poor always with you, but Me ye have not always; for in casting this ointment on My body, she did it for My burying." And he added the prophecy—a prophecy which to this day is memorably fulfilled—that wherever the Gospel should be preached that deed of hers should be recorded and honoured.

"For My burying"—clearly, therefore, His condemnation and burial were near at hand. This was another death-blow to all false Messianic hopes. No earthly wealth, no regal elevation could be looked for by the followers of One who was so soon to die. It may have been another impulse of disappointment to the thievish traitor who had thus publicly been not only thwarted, but also silenced, and implicitly rebuked. The loss of the money, which *might* by imagination have been under his own control, burnt in him with "a secret, dark, melancholic fire." He would *not* lose everything. In his hatred, and madness, and despair, he slunk away from Bethany that night, and made his way to Jerusalem, and got introduced into the council-room of the chief priests in the house of Caiaphas, and had that first fatal interview in which he bargained with them to betray his Lord. "What are you willing to give me, and I will betray Him to you?" What greedy chafferings took place we are not told, nor whether the

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

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

CHAPTER XLIX.

PALM SUNDAY.

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

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