LESSON THIRTY-ONE

CHAPTER LXI.

THE CRUCIFIXION.

"I, MILES, EXPEDI CRUCEM" ("Go, soldier, get ready the cross"). In some such formula of terrible import Pilate must have given his final order. It was now probably about nine o'clock, and the execution followed immediately upon the judgment. The time required for the necessary preparation would not be very long, and during this brief pause the soldiers, whose duty it was to see that the sentence was carried out, stripped Jesus of the scarlet war-cloak, now dyed with the yet deeper stains of blood, and clad Him again in His own garments. When the cross had been prepared they laid it—or possibly only one of the beams of it—upon His shoulders, and led Him to the place of punishment. The nearness of the great feast, the myriads who were present in Jerusalem, made it desirable to seize the opportunity for striking terror into all Jewish malefactors. Two were therefore selected for execution at the same time with Jesus—two brigands and rebels of the lowest stamp. Their crosses were laid upon them, a maniple of soldiers in full armour were marshalled under the command of their centurion, and, amid thousands of spectators, coldly inquisitive or furiously hostile, the procession started on its way.

The cross was not, and could not have been, the massive and lofty structure with which such hundreds of pictures have made us familiar. Crucifixion was among the Romans a very common punishment, and it is clear that they would not waste any trouble in constructing the instrument of shame and torture. It would undoubtedly be made of the very commonest wood that came to hand, perhaps olive or sycamore, and knocked together in the very rudest fashion. Still, to support the body of a man, a cross would require to be of a certain size and weight; and to one enfeebled by the horrible severity of the previous scourging, the carrying of such a burden would be an additional misery. But Jesus was enfeebled not only by this cruelty, but by previous days of violent struggle and agitation, by an evening of deep and overwhelming emotion, by a night of sleepless anxiety and suffering, by the mental agony of the garden, by three trials and three sentences of death before the Jews, by the long and exhausting scenes in the Prætorium, by the examination before Herod, and by the brutal and painful derisions which He had undergone, first at the hands of

the Sanhedrin and their servants, then from Herod's body-guard, and lastly from the Roman cohort. All these, superadded to the sickening lacerations of the scourging, had utterly broken down His physical strength. His tottering footsteps, if not His actual falls under that fearful load, made it evident that He lacked the physical strength to carry it from the Prætorium to Golgotha. Even if they did not pity His feebleness, the Roman soldiers would naturally object to the consequent hindrance and delay. But they found an easy method to solve the difficulty. They had not proceeded farther than the city gate, when they met a man coming from the country, who was known to the early Christians as "Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus;" and, perhaps on some hint from the accompanying Jews that Simon sympathised with the teaching of the Sufferer, they impressed him without the least scruple into their odious service.

The miserable procession resumed its course, and though the apocryphal traditions of the Romish Church narrate many incidents of the *Via Dolorosa*, only one such incident is recorded in the Gospel history. St. Luke tells us that among the vast multitude of people who followed Jesus were many women. From the *men* in that moving crowd He does not appear to have received one word of pity or of sympathy. *Some* there must surely have been who had seen His miracles, who had heard His words; some of those who had been almost, if not utterly, convinced of His Messiahship as they hung upon His lips while He had uttered His great discourses in the Temple; some of the eager crowd who had accompanied Him from Bethlehem five days before with shouted hosannas and waving palms. Yet if so, a faithless timidity or a deep misgiving—perhaps even a boundless sorrow—kept them dumb. But these women, more quick to pity, less susceptible to controlling influences, could not and would not conceal the grief and amazement with which this spectacle filled them. They beat upon their breasts and rent the air with their lamentations, till Jesus Himself hushed their shrill cries with words of solemn warning. Turning to them—which He could not have done had He still been staggering under the burden of His cross—He said to them, "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me; but for yourselves weep, and for your children. For lo! days are coming in which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs which bare not, and the breasts which gave not suck. Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us, and to the hills, Cover us; for if they do these things in the green tree, what shall be done

in the dry?" Theirs was but an emotional outburst of womanly tenderness, which they could not repress as they saw the great Prophet of mankind in His hour of shame and weakness, with the herald proclaiming before Him the crimes with which He was charged, and the Roman soldiers carrying the title of derision, and Simon bending under the weight of the wood to which He was to be nailed. But He warned them that, if this were *all* which they saw in the passing spectacle, far bitterer causes of woe awaited them, and their children, and their race. Many of them, and the majority of their children, would live to see such rivers of bloodshed, such complications of agony, as the world had never known before—days which would seem to overpass the capacities of human suffering, and would make men seek to hide themselves, if it might be, under the very roots of the hill on which their city stood. The fig-tree of their nation's life was still green: if such deeds of darkness were possible *now*, what should be done when that tree was withered and blasted, and ready for the burning?—if in the days of hope and decency they could execrate their blameless Deliverer, what would happen in the days of blasphemy and madness and despair? If, under the full light of day, Priests and Scribes could crucify the Innocent, what would be done in the midnight orgies and blood-stained bacchanalia of zealots and murderers? This was a day of crime; that would be a day when Crime had become her own avenging fury. The solemn warning, the last sermon of Christ on earth, was meant primarily for those who heard it; but, like all the words of Christ, it has deeper and wider meaning for all mankind. Those words warn every child of man that the day of careless pleasure and blasphemous disbelief will be followed by the crack of doom; they warn each human being who lives in pleasure on the earth, and eats, and drinks, and is drunken, that though the patience of God waits, and His silence is unbroken, yet the days shall come when He shall speak in thunder, and His wrath shall burn like fire.

And so with this sole sad episode, they came to the fatal place, called Golgotha, or, in its Latin form, Calvary—that is, "a skull." Why it was so called is not known. It may conceivably have been a well-known place of execution; or possibly the name may imply a bare, rounded, scalp-like elevation. It is constantly called the "*hill* of Golgotha," or of Calvary; but the Gospels merely call it "a place," and not a hill (Matt. xxvii. 33; Mark xv. 22). Respecting its site volumes have been written, but nothing is known. The data for

anything approaching to certainty are wholly wanting; and, in all probability, the actual spot lies buried and obliterated under the mountainous rubbish-heaps of the ten-times-taken city. The rugged and precipitous mountain represented in sacred pictures is as purely imaginary as the skull of Adam, which is often painted lying at the foot of the cross, or as any other of the scores of legends which have gathered round this most stupendous and moving scene in the world's history. All that we know of Golgotha, all that we shall ever know, all that God willed to be known, is that it was without the city gate. The religion of Christ is spiritual; it needs no relic; it is independent of Holy Places; it says to each of its children, not "Lo, here!" and "Lo, there!" but "The kingdom of God is within you."

Utterly brutal and revolting as was the punishment of crucifixion, which has now for fifteen hundred years been abolished by the common pity and abhorrence of mankind, there was one custom in Judæa, and one occasionally practised by the Romans, which reveals some touch of passing humanity. The latter consisted in giving to the sufferer a blow under the arm-pit, which, without causing death, yet hastened its approach. Of this I need not speak, because, for whatever reason, it was not practised on this occasion. The former, which seems to have been due to the milder nature of Judaism, and which was derived from a happy piece of Rabbinic exegesis on Prov. xxxi. 6, consisted in giving to the condemned, immediately before his execution, a draught of wine medicated with some powerful opiate. It had been the custom of wealthy ladies in Jerusalem to provide this stupefying potion at their own expense, and they did so quite irrespectively of their sympathy for any individual criminal. It was probably taken freely by the two malefactors, but when they offered it to Jesus He would not take it. The refusal was an act of sublimest heroism. The effect of the draught was to dull the nerves, to cloud the intellect, to provide an anæsthetic against some part, at least, of the lingering agonies of that dreadful death. But He, whom some modern sceptics have been base enough to accuse of feminine feebleness and cowardly despair, preferred rather "to look Death in the face"—to meet the King of Terrors without striving to deaden the force of one agonising anticipation, or to still the throbbing of one lacerated nerve.

The three crosses were laid on the ground—that of Jesus, which was doubtless taller than the other two, being placed in bitter scorn in the midst. Perhaps the cross-beam was now nailed to the upright, and certainly the title, which had either been borne by Jesus fastened

round His neck, or carried by one of the soldiers in front of Him, was now nailed to the summit of His cross. Then He was stripped of all His clothes, and then followed the most awful moment of all. He was laid down upon the implement of torture. His arms were stretched along the cross-beams, and at the centre of the open palms the point of a huge iron nail was placed, which, by the blow of a mallet, was driven home into the wood. Then through either foot separately, or possibly through both together as they were placed one over the other, another huge nail tore its way. Whether the sufferer was *also* bound to the cross we do not know; but to prevent the hands and feet being torn away by the weight of the body, which could not "rest upon nothing but four great wounds," there was, about the centre of the cross, a wooden projection strong enough to support, at least in part, a human body which soon became a weight of agony.

It was probably at this moment of inconceivable horror that the voice of the Son of Man was heard uplifted, not in a scream of natural agony at that fearful torture, but calmly praying in Divine compassion for His brutal and pitiless murderers—aye, and for all who in their sinful ignorance crucify Him afresh for ever—"FATHER, FORGIVE THEM, FOR THEY KNOW NOT WHAT THEY DO."

And then the accursed tree—with its living human burden hanging upon it in helpless agony, and suffering fresh tortures as every movement irritated the fresh rents in hands and feet—was slowly heaved up by strong arms, and the end of it fixed firmly in a hole dug deep in the ground for that purpose. The feet were but a little raised above the earth. The victim was in full reach of every hand that might choose to strike, in close proximity to every gesture of insult and hatred. He might hang for hours to be taunted or even tortured by the ever-moving multitude who, with that desire to see what is horrible which always characterises the coarsest hearts, had thronged to gaze upon a sight which should rather have made them weep tears of blood.

And there, in tortures which grew ever more insupportable, as time flowed on, the unhappy victims might linger in a living death so cruel, that often they were driven to entreat and implore the spectators, or the executioners, for dear pity's sake, to put an end to anguish too awful for man to bear—conscious to the last, and often, with tears of abject misery, beseeching from their enemies the priceless boon of death.

For indeed a death by crucifixion seems to include all that pain

and death *can* have of horrible and ghastly—dizziness, cramp, thirst, starvation, sleeplessness, traumatic fever, tetanus, publicity of shame, long continuance of torment, horror of anticipation, mortification of untended wounds—all intensified just up to the point at which they can be endured at all, but all stopping just short of the point which would give to the sufferer the relief of unconsciousness. The unnatural position made every movement painful; the lacerated veins and crushed tendons throbbed with incessant anguish; the wounds, inflamed by exposure, gradually gangrened; the arteries—especially of the head and stomach — became swollen and oppressed with surcharged blood; and while each variety of misery went on gradually increasing, there was added to them the intolerable pang of a burning and raging thirst; and all these physical complications caused an internal excitement and anxiety, which made the prospect of death itself—of death, the awful unknown enemy, at whose approach man usually shudders most—bear the aspect of a delicious and exquisite release.

Such was the death to which Christ was doomed; and though for Him it was happily shortened by all that He had previously endured, yet He hung from soon after noon until nearly sunset, before "He gave up his soul to death."

When the cross was uplifted, the leading Jews, for the first time, prominently noticed the deadly insult in which Pilate had vented his indignation. Before, in their blind rage, they had imagined that the manner of his crucifixion was an insult aimed at *Jesus;* but now that they saw Him hanging between the two robbers, on a cross yet loftier, it suddenly flashed upon them that it was a public scorn inflicted upon *them.* For on the white wooden tablet smeared with gypsum, which was to be seen so conspicuously over the head of Jesus on the cross, ran, in black letters, an inscription in the three civilised languages of the ancient world—the three languages of which *one* at least was certain to be known by every single man in that assembled multitude —in the official Latin, in the current Greek, in the vernacular Aramaic—informing all that this Man who was thus enduring a shameful, servile death—this Man thus crucified between two *sicarii* in the sight of the world, was

"THE KING OF THE JEWS."

To Him who was crucified the poor malice seemed to have in it nothing of derision. Even on His cross He reigned; even there He

seemed divinely elevated above the priests who had brought about His death, and the coarse, idle, vulgar multitude who had flocked to feed their greedy eyes upon His sufferings. The malice was quite impotent against One whose spiritual and moral nobleness struck awe into dying malefactors and heathen executioners, even in the lowest abyss of His physical degradation. With the passionate ill-humour of the Roman governor there probably blended a vein of seriousness. While he was delighted to revenge himself on his detested subjects by an act of public insolence, he probably meant, or half meant, to imply that this *was*, in one sense, the King of the Jews—the greatest, the noblest, the truest of His race—whom, therefore, His race had crucified. The King was not unworthy of His kingdom, but the kingdom of the King. There was something loftier even than royalty in the glazing eyes which never ceased to look with sorrow on the City of Righteousness, which had now become a city of murderers. The Jews felt the intensity of the scorn with which Pilate had treated them. It so completely poisoned their hour of triumph, that they sent their chief priests in deputation, begging the Governor to alter the obnoxious title. "Write not," they said, "'The King of the Jews,' but that 'He *said*, I am the King of the Jews.'" But Pilate's courage, which had oozed away so rapidly at the name of Cæsar, had now revived. He was glad in any and every way to browbeat and thwart the men whose seditious clamour had forced him in the morning to act against his will. Few men had the power of giving expression to a sovereign contempt more effectually than the Romans. Without deigning any justification of what he had done, Pilate summarily dismissed these solemn hierarchs with the curt and contemptuous reply, "What I have written, I have written."

In order to prevent the possibility of any rescue, even at the last moment—since instances had been known of men taken from the cross and restored to life—a quaternion of soldiers with their centurion were left on the ground to guard the cross. The clothes of the victims always fell as perquisites to the men who had to perform so weary and disagreeable an office. Little dreaming how exactly they were fulfilling the mystic intimations of olden Jewish prophecy, they proceeded, therefore, to divide between them the garments of Jesus. The *tallîth* they tore into four parts, probably ripping it down the seams (Deut. xxii. 12); but the *ketôneth*, or under garment, was formed of one continuous woven texture, and to tear would have been to spoil it; they therefore contented themselves with letting it become the

property of any one of the four to whom it should fall by lot. When this had been decided, they sat down and watched Him till the end, beguiling the weary hours by eating and drinking, and gibing, and playing dice.

It was a scene of tumult. The great body of the people seem to have stood silently at gaze; but some few of them as they passed by the cross—perhaps some of the many false witnesses and other conspirators of the previous night—mocked at Jesus with insulting noises and taunts, especially bidding Him come down from the cross and save Himself, since He could destroy the Temple and build it in three days. And the chief priests, and scribes, and elders, less awe-struck, less compassionate than the mass of the people, were not ashamed to disgrace their grey-haired dignity by adding their reproaches to those of the evil few. Unrestrained by the patience of the Sufferer, unsated by the accomplishment of their wicked vengeance, unmoved by the sight of helpless anguish and the look of eyes that began to glaze in death, they congratulated one another under His cross with scornful insolence—"He saved others, Himself He cannot save." "Let this Christ, this King of Israel, descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe." No wonder then that the ignorant soldiers took their share of mockery with these shameless hierarchs; no wonder that, at their midday meal, they pledged in mock hilarity the Dying Man, cruelly holding up towards His burning lips their cups of sour wine, and echoing the Jewish taunts against the weakness of the King whose throne was a cross, whose crown was thorns. Nay, even the poor wretches who were crucified with Him caught the hideous infection; comrades, perhaps, of the respited Bar-Abbas—heirs of the rebellious fury of a Judas the Gaulonite—trained to recognise no Messiah but a Messiah of the sword, they reproachfully bade Him, if His claims were true, to save Himself and them. So *all* the voices about Him rang with blasphemy and spite, and in that long slow agony His dying ear caught no accent of gratitude, of pity, or of love. Baseness, falsehood, savagery, stupidity—such were the characteristics of the world which thrust itself into hideous prominence before the Saviour's last consciousness—such the muddy stream that rolled under the cross before His dying eyes.

But amid this chorus of infamy Jesus spoke not. He *could* have spoken. The pains of crucifixion did not confuse the intellect, or paralyse the powers of speech. We read of crucified men who, for hours together upon the cross, vented their sorrow, their rage, or their

despair in the manner that best accorded with their character; of some who raved and cursed, and spat at their enemies; of others who protested to the last against the iniquity of their sentence; of others who implored compassion with abject entreaties; of one even who, from the cross, as from a tribunal, harangued the multitude of his countrymen, and upbraided them with their wickedness and vice. But, except to bless and to encourage, and to add to the happiness and hope of others, Jesus spoke not. So far as the malice of the passers-by, and of priests and Sanhedrists, and soldiers, and of these poor robbers, who suffered with Him, was concerned—as before during the trial so now upon the cross—He maintained unbroken His kingly silence.

But that silence, joined to His patient majesty and the divine holiness and innocence which radiated from Him like a halo, was more eloquent than any words. It told earliest on one of the crucified robbers. At first this "bonus latro" of the Apocryphal Gospel seems to have faintly joined in the reproaches uttered by his fellow-sinner; but when those reproaches merged into deeper blasphemy he spoke out his inmost thought. It is probable that he had met Jesus before, and heard Him, and perhaps been one of those thousands who had seen His miracles. There is indeed no authority for the legend which assigns to him the name of Dysmas, or for the beautiful story of his having saved the life of the Virgin and her Child during their flight into Egypt. But on the plains of Gennesareth, perhaps from some robber's cave in the wild ravines of the Valley of the Doves, he may well have approached His presence—he may well have been one of those publicans and sinners who drew near to Him for to hear Him. And the words of Jesus had found some room in the good ground of his heart; they had not all fallen upon stony places. Even at this hour of shame and death, when he was suffering the just consequence of his past evil deeds, faith triumphed. As a flame sometimes leaps up among dying embers, so amid the white ashes of a sinful life which lay so thick upon his heart, the flame of love towards his God and his Saviour was not quite quenched. Under the hellish outcries which had broken loose around the cross of Jesus, there had lain a deep misgiving. Half of them seem to have been instigated by doubt and fear. Even in the self-congratulations of the priests we catch an undertone of dread. Suppose that even now some imposing miracle should be wrought? Suppose that even now that martyr-form should burst indeed into Messianic splendour, and the King, who seemed to be in the slow misery of death, should suddenly with a great voice summon His legions of angels, and

springing from His cross upon the rolling clouds of heaven, come in flaming fire to take vengeance upon His enemies? And the air seemed to be full of signs. There was a gloom of gathering darkness in the sky, a thrill and tremor in the solid earth, a haunting presence as of ghostly visitants who chilled the heart and hovered in awful witness above that scene. The dying robber had joined at first in the half-taunting, half-despairing appeal to a defeat and weakness which contradicted all that he had hoped; but now this defeat seemed to be greater than victory, and this weakness more irresistible than strength. As he looked, the faith in his heart dawned more and more into the perfect day. He had long ceased to utter any reproachful words; he now rebuked his comrade's blasphemies. Ought not the suffering innocence of Him who hung between them to shame into silence their just punishment and flagrant guilt? And so, turning his head to Jesus, he uttered the intense appeal, "O Jesus, remember me when Thou comest in Thy kingdom." Then He, who had been mute amid invectives, spake at once in answer to that humble prayer, "VERILY, I SAY TO THEE, TO-DAY SHALT THOU BE WITH ME IN PARADISE."

Though none spoke to comfort Jesus—though deep grief, and terror, and amazement kept them dumb—yet there were hearts amid the crowd that beat in sympathy with the awful Sufferer. At a distance stood a number of women looking on, and perhaps, even at that dread hour, expecting His immediate deliverance. Many of these were women who had ministered to Him in Galilee, and had come from thence in the great band of Galilæan pilgrims. Conspicuous among this heart-stricken group were His mother Mary, Mary of Magdala, Mary the wife of Clopas, mother of James and Joses, and Salome the wife of Zebedee. Some of them, as the hours advanced, stole nearer and nearer to the cross, and at length the filming eye of the Saviour fell on His own mother Mary, as, with the sword piercing through and through her heart, she stood with the disciple whom He loved. His mother does not seem to have been much with Him during His ministry. It may be that the duties and cares of a humble home rendered it impossible. At any rate, the only occasions on which we hear of her are occasions when she is with His brethren, and is joined with them in endeavouring to influence, apart from His own purposes and authority, His Messianic course. But although at the very beginning of His ministry He had gently shown her that the earthly and filial relation was now to be transcended by one far more lofty and divine, and though this end of all her high hopes must

have tried her faith with an unspeakable sorrow, yet she was true to Him in this supreme hour of His humiliation, and would have done for Him all that a mother's sympathy and love can do. Nor had He for a moment forgotten her who had bent over His infant slumbers, and with whom He had shared those thirty years in the cottage at Nazareth. Tenderly and sadly He thought of the future that awaited her during the remaining years of her life on earth, troubled as they must be by the tumults and persecutions of a struggling and nascent faith. After His resurrection her lot was wholly cast among His Apostles, and the Apostle whom He loved the most, the Apostle who was nearest to Him in heart and life, seemed the fittest to take care of her. To him, therefore—to John whom He had loved more than His brethren—to John whose head had leaned upon His breast at the Last Supper, He consigned her as a sacred charge. "WOMAN," He said to her, in fewest words, but in words which breathed the uttermost spirit of tenderness, "BEHOLD THY SON;" and then to St. John, "BEHOLD THY MOTHER." He could make no gesture with those pierced hands, but he could bend His head. They listened in speechless emotion, but from that hour—perhaps from that very moment—leading her away from a spectacle which did but torture her soul with unavailing agony, that disciple took her to his own home.

It was now noon, and at the Holy City the sunshine should have been burning over that scene of horror with a power such as it has in the full depth of an English summer-time. But instead of this, the face of the heavens was black, and the noonday sun was "turned into darkness," on "this great and terrible day of the Lord." It could have been no darkness of any natural eclipse, for the Paschal moon was at the full; but it was one of those "signs from heaven" for which, during the ministry of Jesus, the Pharisees had so often clamoured in vain. The early Fathers appealed to Pagan authorities—the historian Thallus, the chronicler Phlegon—for such a darkness; but we have no means of testing the accuracy of these references, and it is quite possible that the darkness was a local gloom which hung densely over the guilty city and its immediate neighbourhood. But whatever it was, it clearly filled the minds of all who beheld it with yet deeper misgiving. The taunts and jeers of the Jewish priests and the heathen soldiers were evidently confined to the earlier hours of the crucifixion. Its later stages seem to have thrilled alike the guilty and the innocent with emotions of dread and horror. Of the incidents of those last

three hours we are told nothing, and that awful obscuration of the noonday sun may well have overawed every heart into an inaction respecting which there was nothing to relate. What Jesus suffered *then* for us men and our salvation we cannot know, for during those three hours He hung upon His cross in silence and darkness; or, if He spoke, there were none there to record His words. But towards the close of that time His anguish culminated, and—emptied to the very uttermost of that glory which He had since the world began—drinking to the very deepest dregs the cup of humiliation and bitterness—enduring, not only to have taken upon Him the form of a servant, but also to suffer the last infamy which human hatred could impose on servile helplessness—He uttered that mysterious cry, of which the full significance will never be fathomed by man—

"ELI, ELI, LAMA SABACHTHANI?" ("My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?")

In those words, quoting the Psalm in which the early Fathers rightly saw a far-off prophecy of the whole passion of Christ, He borrowed from David's agony the expression of His own. In that hour He was alone. Sinking from depth to depth of unfathomable suffering, until, at the close approach of a death which — because He was God, and yet had been made man—was more awful to Him than it could ever be to any of the sons of men, it seemed as if even His Divine Humanity could endure no more.

Doubtless the voice of the Sufferer—though uttered loudly in that paroxysm of an emotion which, in another, would almost have touched the verge of despair—was yet rendered more uncertain and indistinct from the condition of exhaustion in which He hung; and so, amid the darkness, and confused noise, and dull footsteps of the moving multitude, there were some who did not hear what He had said. They had caught only the first syllable, and said to one another that He had called on the name of Elijah. The readiness with which they seized this false impression is another proof of the wild state of excitement and terror—the involuntary dread of something great, and unforeseen, and terrible—to which they had been reduced from their former savage insolence. For Elijah, the great prophet of the Old Covenant, was inextricably mingled with all the Jewish expectations of a Messiah, and these expectations were full of wrath. The coming of Elijah would be the coming of a day of fire, in which the sun should be turned into blackness and the moon into blood, and the powers of heaven should be shaken. Already the noonday sun was shrouded in

unnatural eclipse: might not some awful form at any moment rend the heavens and come down, touch the mountains and they should smoke? The vague anticipation of conscious guilt was unfulfilled. Not such as yet was to be the method of God's workings. His messages to man for many ages more were not to be in the thunder and earthquake, not in rushing wind or roaring flame, but in the "still small voice" speaking always amid the apparent silences of Time in whispers intelligible to man's heart, but in which there is neither speech nor language, though the voice is heard.

But now the end was very rapidly approaching, and Jesus, who had been hanging for nearly six hours upon the cross, was suffering from that torment of thirst which is most difficult of all for the human frame to bear—perhaps the most unmitigated of the many separate sources of anguish which were combined in this worst form of death. No doubt this burning thirst was aggravated by seeing the Roman soldiers drinking so near the cross; and happily for mankind, Jesus had never sanctioned the unnatural affectation of stoic impassibility. And so He uttered the one sole word of physical suffering which had been wrung from Him by all the hours in which He had endured the extreme of all that man can inflict. He cried aloud, "I THIRST." Probably a few hours before, the cry would only have provoked a roar of mockery; but now the lookers-on were reduced by awe to a readier humanity. Near the cross there lay on the ground the large earthern vessel containing the *posca*, which was the ordinary drink of the Roman soldiers. The mouth of it was filled with a piece of sponge, which served as a cork. Instantly some one—we know not whether he was friend or enemy, or merely one who was there out of idle curiosity—took out the sponge and dipped it in the *posca* to give it to Jesus. But low as was the elevation of the cross, the head of the Sufferer, as it rested on the horizontal beam of the accursed tree, was just beyond the man's reach; and therefore he put the sponge at the end of a stalk of hyssop—about a foot long—and held it up to the parched and dying lips. Even this simple act of pity, which Jesus did not refuse, seemed to jar upon the condition of nervous excitement with which some of the multitude were looking on. "Let be," they said to the man, "let us see whether Elias is coming to save Him." The man did not desist from his act of mercy, but when it was done he too seems to have echoed those uneasy words. But Elias came not, nor human comforter, nor angel deliverer. It was the will of God, it was the will of the Son of God, that He should be "perfected through

sufferings;"—that—for the eternal example of all His children as long as the world should last—He should "endure unto the end."

And now the end was come. Once more, in the words of the sweet Psalmist of Israel (Psa. xxxi. 5), but adding to them that title of trustful love which, through Him, is permitted to the use of all mankind, "FATHER," He said, "INTO THY HANDS I COMMEND MY SPIRIT." Then with one more great effort He uttered the last cry—the one victorious word (*Τετέλεσται*,), "IT IS FINISHED." It may be that that great cry ruptured some of the vessels of His heart; for no sooner had it been uttered than He bowed His head upon His breast, and yielded His life, "a ransom for many"—a willing sacrifice to His Heavenly Father. "Finished was His holy life; with His life His struggle, with His struggle His work, with His work the redemption, with the redemption the foundation of the new world." At that moment the vail of the Temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom. An earthquake shook the earth and split the rocks, and as it rolled away from their places the great stones which closed and covered the cavern sepulchres of the Jews, so it seemed to the imaginations of many to have disimprisoned the spirits of the dead, and to have filled the air with ghostly visitants, who after Christ had risen appeared to linger in the Holy City. These circumstances of amazement, joined to all they had observed in the bearing of the Crucified, cowed even the cruel and gay indifference of the Roman soldiers. On the centurion, who was in command of them, the whole scene had exercised a yet deeper influence. As he stood opposite to the cross and saw the Saviour die, he glorified God, and exclaimed, "This Man was in truth righteous"—nay, more, "This Man was a Son of God." Even the multitude, utterly sobered from their excitement and rage, began to be weighed down with a guilty consciousness that the scene which they had witnessed had in it something more awful than they could have conceived, and as they returned to Jerusalem they wailed, and beat upon their breasts. Well might they do so! This was the last drop in a full cup of wickedness: this was the beginning of the end of their city, and name, and race.

And in truth that scene was more awful than they or even we can know. The secular historian, be he ever so sceptical, cannot fail to see in it the central point of the world's history. Whether he be a believer in Christ or not, he cannot refuse to admit that this new religion grew from the smallest of all seeds to be a mighty tree, so that the birds of the air took refuge in its branches; that it was the

little stone cut without hands which dashed into pieces the colossal image of heathen greatness, and grew till it became a great mountain and filled the earth. Alike to the infidel and to the believer the crucifixion is the boundary instant between ancient and modern days. Morally and physically, no less than spiritually, the Faith of Christ was the Palingenesia of the world. It came like the dawn of a new spring to nations "effete with the drunkenness of crime." The struggle was long and hard, but from the hour when Christ died began the death-knell to every Satanic tyranny and every tolerated abomination. From that hour Holiness became the universal ideal of all who name the name of Christ as their Lord, and the attainment of that ideal the common heritage of souls in which His Spirit dwells.

The effects, then, of the work of Christ are even to the unbeliever indisputable and historical. It expelled cruelty; it curbed passion; it branded suicide; it punished and repressed an execrable infanticide; it drove the shameless impurities of heathendom into a congenial darkness. There was hardly a class whose wrongs it did not remedy. It rescued the gladiator; it freed the slave; it protected the captive; it nursed the sick; it sheltered the orphan; it elevated the woman; it shrouded as with a halo of sacred innocence the tender years of the child. In every region of life its ameliorating influence was felt. It changed pity from a vice into a virtue. It elevated poverty from a curse into a beatitude. It ennobled labour from a vulgarity into a dignity and a duty. It sanctified marriage from little more than a burdensome convention into little less than a blessed sacrament. It revealed for the first time the angelic beauty of a Purity of which men had despaired and of a Meekness at which they had utterly scoffed. It created the very conception of charity, and broadened the limits of its obligation from the narrow circle of a neighbourhood to the widest horizons of the race. And while it thus evolved the idea of Humanity as a common brotherhood, even where its tidings were *not* believed—all over the world, wherever its tidings *were* believed, it cleansed the life and elevated the soul of each individual man. And in all lands where it has moulded the characters of its true believers, it has created hearts so pure, and lives so peaceful, and homes so sweet, that it might seem as though those angels who had heralded its advent had also whispered to every depressed and despairing sufferer among the sons of men, "Though ye have lien among the pots, yet shall ye be as the wings of a dove, that is covered with silver wings, and her feathers like gold."

Others, if they *can* and *will*, may see in such a work as this no

Divine Providence; they may think it philosophical enlightenment to hold that Christianity and Christendom are adequately accounted for by the idle dreams of a self-deceiver, and the passionate hallucinations of a demoniac. We persecute them not, we denounce them not, we judge them not; but we say that, unless all life be a hollow, there could have been no such miserable origin to the sole religion of the world which holds the perfect balance between philosophy and popularity, between religion and morals, between meek submissiveness and the pride of freedom, between the ideal and the real, between the inward and the outward, between modest stillness and heroic energy, nay, between the tenderest conservatism and the boldest plans of world-wide reformation. The witness of History to Christ is a witness which has been given with irresistible cogency; and it has been so given to none but Him.

But while even the unbeliever must see what the life and death of Jesus have effected in the world, to the believer that life and death are something deeper still; to him they are nothing less than a resurrection from the dead. He sees in the cross of Christ something which far transcends its historical significance. He sees in it the fulfilment of all prophecy as well as the consummation of all history; he sees in it the explanation of the mystery of birth, and the conquest over the mystery of the grave. In that life he finds a perfect example; in that death an infinite redemption. As he contemplates the Incarnation and the Crucifixion, he no longer feels that God is far away, and that this earth is but a disregarded speck in the infinite azure, and he himself but an insignificant atom chance-thrown amid the thousand million living souls of an innumerable race, but he exclaims in faith and hope and love, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men; yea, He will be their God, and they shall be His people." "Ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them" (Ezek. xxxvii. 27; 2 Cor. vi. 16).

The sun was westering as the darkness rolled away from the completed sacrifice. They who had not thought it a pollution to inaugurate their feast by the murder of their Messiah, were seriously alarmed lest the sanctity of the following day—which began at sunset—should be compromised by the hanging of the corpses on the cross. And, horrible to relate, the crucified often lived for many hours—nay, even for two days—in their torture. The Jews therefore begged Pilate that their legs might be broken, and their bodies taken down. This *crurifragium*, as it was called, consisted in striking the legs of the sufferers with a heavy mallet, a violence which seemed always to have hastened, if it

did not instantly cause their death. Nor would the Jews be the only persons who would be anxious to hasten the end by giving the deadly blow. Until life was extinct, the soldiers appointed to guard the execution dared not leave the ground. The wish, therefore, was readily granted. The soldiers broke the legs of the two malefactors first, and then, coming to Jesus, found that the great cry had been indeed His last, and that He was dead already. They did not, therefore, break His legs, and thus unwittingly preserved the symbolism of that Paschal lamb, of which He was the antitype, and of which it had been commanded that "a bone of it shall not be broken" (Exod. xii. 46). And yet, as He might be only in a syncope—as instances had been known in which men apparently dead had been taken down from the cross and resuscitated—and as the lives of the soldiers would have had to answer for any irregularity, one of them, in order to make death certain, drove the broad head of his *hasta* into his side. The wound, as it was meant to do, pierced the region of the heart, and "forthwith," says St. John, with an emphatic appeal to the truthfulness of his eye-witness (an appeal which would be singularly and impossibly blasphemous if the narrative were the forgery which so much elaborate modern criticism has wholly failed to prove that it is), "forthwith came there out blood and water." Whether the water was due to some abnormal pathological conditions caused by the dreadful complication of the Saviour's sufferings—or whether it rather means that the pericardium had been rent by the spear-point, and that those who took down the body observed some drops of its serum mingled with the blood—in either case that lance-thrust was sufficient to hush all the heretical assertions that Jesus had only *seemed* to die; and as it assured the soldiers, so should it assure all who have doubted, that He, who on the third day rose again, had in truth been crucified, dead, and buried, and that His soul had passed into the unseen world.

CHAPTER LXII.

THE RESURRECTION.

At the moment when Christ died, nothing could have seemed more abjectly weak, more pitifully hopeless, more absolutely doomed to scorn, and extinction, and despair, than the Church which He had founded.