

vengeance wing their flight from far: thither from the ends of the earth come nations of a fierce countenance, "swift as the eagle flieth," to rend and to devour. "Her young ones also suck up blood: and where the slain are, there is she." Jerusalem—nay, the whole Jewish nation—was falling rapidly into the dissolution arising from internal decay; and already the flap of avenging pinions was in the air. When the world too should lie in a state of morbid infamy, then should be heard once more the rushing of those "congregated wings."

Is not all history one long vast commentary on these great prophecies? In the destinies of nations and of races has not the Christ returned again and again to deliver or to judge?

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**LESSON TWENTY-THREE**

**CHAPTER XLV.**

**THE FEAST OF DEDICATION.**

**NOWHERE**, in all probability, did Jesus pass more restful and happy hours than in the quiet house of that little family at Bethany, which, as we are told by St. John, "He loved." The family, so far as we know, consisted only of Martha, Mary, and their brother Lazarus. That Martha was a widow—that her husband was, or had been, Simon the Leper—that Lazarus is identical with the gentle and holy Rabbi of that name mentioned in the Talmud—are conjectures that may or may not be true; but we see from the Gospels that they were a family in easy circumstances, and of sufficient dignity and position to excite considerable attention not only in their own little village of Bethany, but even in Jerusalem. The lovely little hamlet, lying among its peaceful uplands, near Jerusalem, and yet completely hidden from it by the summit of Olivet, and thus

"Not wholly in the busy world, nor quite  
Beyond it."

must always have had for the soul of Jesus an especial charm; and the more so because of the friends whose love and reverence always placed at His disposal their holy and happy home. It is there that we find Him on the eve of the Feast of the Dedication, which marked the close of that public journey designed for the full and final proclamation of His coming kingdom.

It was natural that there should be some stir in the little household at the coming of such a Guest, and Martha, the busy, eager-hearted, affectionate hostess, "on hospitable thoughts intent," hurried to and fro with excited energy to prepare for His proper entertainment. Her sister Mary, too, was anxious to receive Him fittingly, but her notions of the reverence due to Him were of a different kind. Knowing that her sister was only too happy to do all that could be done for His material comfort, she, in deep humility, sat at His feet and listened to His words.

Mary was not to blame, for her sister evidently enjoyed the task which she had chosen of providing as best she could for the claims of hospitality, and was quite able, without any assistance, to do everything that was required. Nor was Martha to blame for her active service; her sole fault was that, in this outward activity, she lost the necessary equilibrium of an inward claim. As she toiled and planned to serve Him, a little touch of jealousy disturbed her peace as she saw her quiet sister sitting—"idly" she may have thought—at the feet of their great Visitor, and leaving the trouble to fall on her. If she had taken time to think, she could not but have acknowledged that there may have been as much of consideration as of selfishness in Mary's withdrawal into the background in their domestic administration; but to be just and noble-minded is always difficult, nor is it even possible when any one meanness, such as petty jealousy, is suffered to intrude. So, in the first blush of her vexation, Martha, instead of gently asking her sister to help her, if help, indeed, were needed—an appeal which, if we judge of Mary aright, she would instantly have heard—she almost impatiently, and not quite reverently, hurries in, and asks Jesus if He really did not care to see her sister sitting there with her hands before her, while *she* was left single-handed to do all the work. Would He not tell her (Martha could not have fairly added that common piece of ill-nature, "It is of no use for *me* to tell her") to go and help?

An imperfect soul, seeing what is good and great and true, but very often failing in the attempt to attain to it, is apt to be very hard in its judgments on the shortcomings of others. But a divine and sovereign soul—a soul that has more nearly attained to the measure of the stature of the perfect man—takes a calmer and gentler, because a larger-hearted view of those little weaknesses and indirectnesses which it cannot but daily see. And so the answer of Jesus, if it were a reproof, was at any rate an infinitely gentle and tender one, and one which

would purify but would not pain the poor faithful heart of the busy young matron to whom it was addressed. "Martha, Martha," so He said—and as we hear that most natural address may we not imagine the half-sad, half-playful, but wholly kind and healing smile which lightened His face?—"thou art anxious and bustling about many things, whereas but one thing is needful; but Mary chose for herself the good part, which shall not be taken away from her." There is none of that exaltation here of the contemplative over the active life which Roman Catholic writers have seen in the passage, and on which they are so fond of dwelling. Either may be necessary, both must be combined. Paul, as has well been said, in his most fervent activity, had yet the contemplativeness and inward calm of Mary; and John, with the most rapt spirit of contemplation, could yet practise the activity of Martha. Jesus did not mean to reprobate any amount of work undertaken in His service, but only the spirit of fret and fuss—the want of all repose and calm—the ostentation of superfluous hospitality—in doing it; and still more that tendency to reprobate and interfere with others, which is so often seen in Christians who are as anxious as Martha, but have none of Mary's holy trustfulness and perfect calm.

It is likely that Bethany was the home of Jesus during His visits to Jerusalem, and from it a short and delightful walk over the Mount of Olives would take Him to the Temple. It was now winter-time, and the Feast of the Dedication was being celebrated. This feast was held on the 25th of Cisleu, and, according to Wieseler, fell this year on December 20. It was founded by Judas Maccabæus in honour of the cleansing of the Temple in the year B.C. 164, six years and a half after its fearful profanation by Antiochus Epiphanes. Like the Passover and the Tabernacles, it lasted eight days, and was kept with great rejoicing. Besides its Greek name of Encænia, it had the name of τὰ φῶτα, or the Lights, and one feature of the festivity was a general illumination to celebrate the legendary miracle of a miraculous multiplication, for eight days, of the holy oil which had been found by Judas Maccabæus in one single jar sealed with the High Priest's seal. Our Lord's presence at such a festival sanctions the right of each Church to ordain its own rites and ceremonies, and shows that He looked with no disapproval on the joyous enthusiasm of national patriotism.

The eastern porch of the Temple still retained the name of Solomon's Porch, because it was at least built of the materials which had formed part of the ancient Temple. Here, in this bright colonnade, decked

for the feast with glittering trophies, Jesus was walking up and down, quietly, and apparently without companions, sometimes, perhaps, gazing across the valley of the Kidron at the whited sepulchres of the prophets, whom generations of Jews had slain, and enjoying the mild winter sunlight, when, as though by a preconcerted movement, the Pharisaic party and their leaders suddenly surrounded and began to question Him. Perhaps the very spot where He was walking, recalling as it did the memories of their ancient glory—perhaps the memories of the glad feast which they were celebrating, as the anniversary of a splendid deliverance wrought by a handful of brave men who had overthrown a colossal tyranny—inspired their ardent appeal. “How long,” they impatiently inquired, “dost Thou hold our souls in painful suspense? If Thou really art the Messiah, tell us with confidence. Tell us *here*, in Solomon’s Porch, *now*, while the sight of these shields and golden crowns, and the melody of these citherns and cymbals, recall the glory of Judas the Asmonæan—wilt Thou be a mightier Maccabæus, a more glorious Solomon? shall these citrons, and fair boughs, and palms, which we carry in honour of this day’s victory, be carried some day for Thee?” It was a strange, impetuous, impatient appeal, and is full of significance. It forms their own strong condemnation, for it shows distinctly that He had spoken words and done deeds which would have justified and substantiated such a claim had He chosen definitely to assert it. And if He had in so many words asserted it—above all, had He asserted it in the sense and with the objects which they required—it is probable that they would have instantly welcomed Him with tumultuous acclaim. The place where they were speaking recalled the most gorgeous dreams of their ancient monarchy; the occasion was rife with the heroic memories of one of their bravest and most successful warriors; the political conditions which surrounded them were exactly such as those from which the noble Asmonæan had delivered them. One spark of that ancient flame would have kindled their inflammable spirits into such a blaze of irresistible fanaticism as might for the time have swept away both the Romans and the Herods, but which—since the hour of their fall had already begun to strike, and the cup of their iniquity was already full—would only have antedated by many years the total destruction which fell upon them, first when they were slain by myriads at the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus, and afterwards when the false Messiah, Bar-Cocheba, and his followers, were so frightfully exterminated at the capture of Bethyr.

But the day for political deliverances was past; the day for a higher, deeper, wider, more eternal deliverance had come. For the former they yearned, the latter they rejected. Passionate to claim in Jesus an exclusive temporal Messiah, they repelled Him with hatred as the Son of God, the Saviour of the world. That He was their Messiah in a sense far loftier and more spiritual than they had ever dreamed, His language had again and again implied; but the Messiah in the sense which they required He was not, and would not be. And therefore He does not mislead them by saying, "I *am* your Messiah," but He refers them to that repeated teaching, which showed how clearly such had been His claim, and to the works which bore witness to that claim. Had they been sheep of His flock—and He here reminds them of that great discourse which He had delivered at the Feast of Tabernacles two months before—they would have heard His voice, and then He would have given them eternal life, and they would have been safe in His keeping; for no one would then have been able to pluck them out of His Father's hand, and He added solemnly, "I and my Father are one."

His meaning was quite unmistakable. In these words He was claiming not only to be Messiah, but to be Divine. Had the oneness with the Father which He claimed been nothing more than that subjective union of faith and obedience which exists between all holy souls and their Creator, His words could have given no more offence than many a saying of their own kings and prophets; but "*ecce Judaei intellexerunt quod non intelligunt Ariani!*"—they saw at once that the words meant infinitely more. Instantly they stooped to seize some of the scattered heavy stones which the unfinished Temple buildings supplied to their fury, and had His hour been come He could not have escaped the tumultuary death which afterwards befel His proto-martyr. But His undisturbed majesty disarmed them with a word: "Many good deeds did I show you from my Father: for which of these do ye mean to stone me?" "Not for any good deed," they replied, "but for blasphemy, and because thou, being a mere man, art making thyself God." The reply of Jesus is one of those broad gleams of illumination which He often sheds on the interpretation of the Scriptures: "Does it not stand written in your law," He asked them, "'I said, Ye are gods?' If he called them gods (*Elohim*) to whom the Word of God came—and such undeniably is the case in your own Scriptures—do ye say to Him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, 'Thou blasphemest,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God?'" And He

appealed to His life and to His works, as undeniable proofs of His unity with the Father. If His sinlessness and His miracles were not a proof that He *could* not be the presumptuous blasphemer whom they wished to stone—what further proof could be given? They, nursed in the strictest monotheism, and accustomed only to think of God as infinitely far from man, might have learnt even from the Law and from the Prophets that God is near—is in the very mouth and in the very heart—of those who love Him, and even bestows upon them some indwelling brightness of His own internal glory. Might not this be a sign to them, that He who came to fulfil the Law and put a loftier Law in its place—He to whom all the prophets had witnessed—He for whom John had prepared the way—He who spake as never man spake—He who did the works which none other man had ever done since the foundation of the world—He who had ratified all His words, and given significance to all His deeds, by the blameless beauty of an absolutely stainless life—was indeed speaking the truth when He said that He was one with the Father, and that He was the Son of God?

The appeal was irresistible. They dared not stone Him; but, as He was alone and defenceless in the midst of them, they tried to seize Him. But they could not. His presence overawed them. They could only make a passage for Him, and glare their hatred upon Him as He passed from among them. But once more, here was a clear sign that all teaching among them was impossible. He could as little descend to their notions of a Messiah as they could rise to His. To stay among them was but daily to imperil His life in vain. Judea, therefore, was closed to Him, as Galilee was closed to Him. There seemed to be one district only which was safe for Him in His native land, and that was Peræa, the district beyond the Jordan. He retired, therefore, to the other Bethany—the Bethany beyond Jordan, where John had once been baptising—and there He stayed.

What were the incidents of this last stay, or the exact length of its continuance, we do not know. We see, however, that it was not exactly private, for St. John tells us that many resorted to Him there, and believed on Him, and bore witness that John—whom they held to be a prophet, though he had done no miracle—had borne emphatic witness to Jesus in that very place, and that all which he had witnessed was true.

## CHAPTER XLVI.

## THE LAST STAY IN PERÆA.

WHEREVER the ministry of Jesus was in the slightest degree public, there we invariably find the Pharisees watching, lying in wait for Him, tempting Him, trying to entrap Him into some mistaken judgment or ruinous decision. But perhaps even *their* malignity never framed a question to which the answer was so beset with difficulties as when they came to tempt Him with the problem, "Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?"

The question was beset with difficulties on every side, and for many reasons. In the first place, the institution of Moses on the subject was ambiguously expressed. Then this had given rise to a decided opposition of opinion between the two most important and flourishing of the Rabbinic schools. The difference of the schools had resulted in a difference in the customs of the nation. Lastly, the theological, scholastic, ethical, and national difficulties were further complicated by political ones, for the prince in whose domain the question was asked was deeply interested in the answer, and had already put to death the greatest of the prophets for his bold expression of the view which was most hostile to his own practices. Whatever the truckling Rabbis of Galilee might do, St. John the Baptist, at least, had left no shadow of a doubt as to what was his interpretation of the Law of Moses, and he had paid the penalty of his frankness with his life.

Moses had laid down the rule that when a man had married a wife, and "she find no favour in his eyes because he hath found some uncleanness (marg., 'matter of nakedness,' Heb. *ערוה דבר*, *ervath dabhar*) in her, then let him write a bill of divorcement, and give it in her hand, and send her out of his house. And when she is departed out of his house, she may go and be another man's wife." Now in the interpretation of this rule, everything depended on the meaning of the expression *ervath dabhar*, or rather on the meaning of the single word *ervath*. It meant, generally, a stain or desecration, and Hillel, with his school, explained the passage in the sense that a man might "divorce his wife for any disgust which he felt towards her;" even—as the celebrated R. Akiba ventured to say—if he saw any other woman who pleased him more; whereas the school of Shammai

interpreted it to mean that divorce could only take place in cases of scandalous unchastity. Hence the Jews had the proverb in this matter, as in so many others, "Hillel loosed what Shammai bound."

Shammai was morally right and exegetically wrong; Hillel exegetically right and morally wrong. Shammai was only right in so far as he saw that the *spirit* of the Mosaic legislation made no divorce justifiable *in foro conscientiae*, except for the most flagrant immorality; Hillel only right in so far as he saw that Moses had left an opening for divorce *in foro civili* in slighter cases than these. But under such circumstances, to decide in favour of either school would not only be to give mortal offence to the other, but also either to exasperate the lax many or to disgust the high-minded few. For in those corrupt days the vast majority acted at any rate on the principle laid down by Hillel, as the Jews in the East continue to do to this day. Such, in fact, was the universal tendency of the times. In the heathen, and especially in the Roman world, the strictness of the marriage bond had been so shamefully relaxed, that, whereas, in the Republic, centuries had passed before there had been one single instance of a frivolous divorce, under the Empire, on the contrary, divorce was the rule, and faithfulness the exception. The days of the Virginias, and Lucretias, and Cornelias had passed; this was the age of the Julias, the Poppaeas, the Messalinas, the Agrippinas—the days in which, as Seneca says, women no longer reckoned their years by the consuls, but by the number of their repudiated husbands. The Jews had caught up the shameful precedent, and since polygamy had fallen into discredit, they made a near approach to it by the ease with which they were able to dismiss one wife and take another. Even Josephus, a Pharisee of the Pharisees, who on every possible occasion prominently lays claim to the character and position of a devout and religious man, narrates, without the shadow of an apology, that his first wife had abandoned him, that he had divorced the second after she had borne him three children, and that he was then married to a third. But if Jesus decided in favour of Shammai—as all His previous teaching made the Pharisees feel sure that in this particular question He *would* decide—then He would be pronouncing the public opinion that Herod Antipas was a double-dyed adulterer, an adulterer adulterously wedded to an adulterous wife.

But Jesus was never guided in any of His answers by principles of expediency, and was decidedly indifferent alike to the anger of multitudes and to the tyrant's frown. His only object was to give,



even to such inquirers as these, such answers as should elevate them to a nobler sphere. Their axiom, "*Is it lawful?*" had it been sincere, would have involved the answer to their own question. Nothing is lawful to any man who *doubts* its lawfulness. Jesus, therefore, instead of answering them, directs them to the source where the true answer was to be found. Setting the primitive order side by side with the Mosaic institution—meeting their "*Is it lawful?*" with "*Have ye not read?*"—He reminds them that God, who at the beginning had made man male and female, had thereby signified His will that marriage should be the closest and most indissoluble of all relationships—transcending and even, if necessary, superseding all the rest.

"Why, then," they ask—eager to entangle Him in an opposition to "the fiery law"—"did Moses *command* to give a writing of divorcement and put her away?" The form of their question involved one of those false turns so common among the worshippers of the letter; and on this false turn they based their inverted pyramid of yet falser inferences. And so Jesus at once corrected them: "Moses, indeed, for your hardheartedness *permitted* you to put away your wives; but from the beginning it was not so;" and then He adds as formal and fearless a condemnation of Herod Antipas—without naming him—as could have been put in language, "Whoever putteth away his wife and marrieth another, except for fornication, committeth adultery; and he who marrieth the divorced woman committeth adultery:" and Herod's case was the worst conceivable instance of both forms of adultery, for he, while married to an innocent and undivorced wife, had wedded the guilty but still undivorced wife of Herod Philip, his own brother and host; and he had done this, without the shadow of any excuse, out of mere guilty passion, when his own prime of life and that of his paramour was already past.

If the Pharisees chose to make any use of this to bring Jesus into collision with Antipas, and draw down upon Him the fate of John, they might; and if they chose to embitter still more against Him the schools of Hillel and of Shammai, *both* of which were thus shown to be mistaken—that of Hillel from deficiency of moral insight, that of Shammai from lack of exegetical acumen—they might; but meanwhile He had once more thrown a flood of light over the difficulties of the Mosaic legislation, showing that it was provisional, not final—transitory, not eternal. That which the Jews, following their famous Hillel, regarded as a Divine permission of which to be proud, was, on

the contrary, a tolerated evil permitted to the outward life, though not to the enlightened conscience or the pure heart—was, in fact, a standing witness against their hard and imperfect state.

The Pharisees, baffled, perplexed, ashamed as usual, found themselves again confronted by a transcendently loftier wisdom, and a transcendently diviner insight than their own, and retired to hatch fresh plots equally malicious, and destined to be equally futile. But nothing can more fully show the necessity of Christ's teaching than the fact that even the disciples were startled and depressed by it. In this bad age, when corruption was so universal—when in Rome marriage had fallen into such contempt and desuetude that a law had to be passed which rendered celibates liable to a fine—they thought the pure strictness of our Lord's precept so severe that celibacy itself seemed preferable; and this opinion they expressed when they were once more with Him in the house. What a fatal blow would have been given to the world's happiness and the world's morality, had He assented to their rash conclusion! And how marvellous a proof is it of His Divinity, that whereas every other pre-eminent moral teacher—even the very best and greatest of all—has uttered or sanctioned more than one dangerous and deadly error which has been potent to poison the life or peace of nations—all the words of the Lord Jesus were absolutely holy, and divinely healthy words. In His reply He gives none of that entire preference to celibacy which would have been so highly valued by the ascetic and the monk, and would have troubled the consciences of many millions whose union has been blessed by Heaven. He refused to pronounce upon the condition of the celibate so absolute a sanction. All that he said was that this saying of theirs as to the undesirability of marriage had *no* such unqualified bearing; that it was impossible and undesirable for all but the rare and exceptional few. Some, indeed, there were who were unfitted for holy wedlock by the circumstances of their birth or constitution; some, again, by the infamous, though then common, cruelties and atrocities of the dominant slavery; and some who withdrew themselves from all thoughts of marriage for religious purposes, or in consequence of higher necessities. These were not better than others, but only different. It was the duty of some to marry and serve God in the wedded state; it might be the duty of others not to marry, and so to serve God in the celibate state. There is not in these words of Christ all that amount of difficulty and confusion which some have seen in them. His precepts find their best comment in the 7th and 9th

chapters of the First Epistle to the Corinthians, and His clear meaning is that, besides the rare instances of natural incapacity for marriage, there are a few others—and to these few alone the saying of the disciples applied—who could accept the belief that *in peculiar times, or owing to special circumstances, or at the paramount call of exceptional duties,* wedlock must by them be rightly and wisely foregone, because they had received from God the gift and grace of continence, the power of a chaste life, resulting from an imagination purified and ennobled to a particular service.

And then, like a touching and beautiful comment on these high words, and the strongest of all proofs that there was in the mind of Christ no admiration for the “voluntary service” which St. Paul condemns, and the “works of supererogation” which an erring Church upholds—as a proof of His belief that marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled—He took part in a scene that has charmed the imagination of poet and painter in every age. For as though to destroy all false and unnatural notions of the exceptional glory of religious virginity, He, among whose earliest acts it had been to bless a marriage festival, made it one of His latest acts to fondle infants in His arms. It seems to have been known in Peræa that the time of His departure was approaching; and conscious, perhaps, of the words which He had just been uttering, there were fathers and mothers and friends who brought to Him the fruits of holy wedlock—young children and even babes—that He might touch them and pray over them. Ere He left them for ever, they would bid Him a solemn farewell; they would win, as it were, the legacy of His special blessing for the generation yet to come. The disciples thought their conduct forward and officious. They did not wish their Master to be needlessly crowded and troubled; they did not like to be disturbed in their high colloquies. They were indignant that a number of mere women and children should come obtruding on more important persons and interests. Women were not honoured, nor children loved in antiquity as now they are; no halo of romance and tenderness encircled them; too often they were subjected to shameful cruelties and hard neglect. But He who came to be the friend of all sinners, and the helper of all the suffering and the sick, came also to elevate woman to her due honour, centuries before the Teutonic element of modern society was dreamt of, and to be the protector and friend of helpless infancy and innocent childhood<sup>1 & 2</sup> Even the unconscious little ones were to be admitted into His Church by His ~~sacrament~~<sup>ordnance</sup> of baptism, to be made members of Him, and inhe-

**Editor's Note: Two problems are of note here:**

1. The word "sacrament" is misused in this section. It should read "ordinance." There is no saving efficacy in the "ordinance" of baptism. And use of the word "sacrament" when referring to baptism denotes a salvatory practice. The thought that baptism is a sacrament, that is, part of one's salvation, is one of the leading causes of the unscriptural doctrine of "baptismal regeneration." Thus, to avoid that heresy, the word here should be "ordinance" not "sacrament."

2. The second problem is that this whole section smacks of "infant baptism" which is a Roman Catholic invention that has no basis whatsoever in the Scriptures.

We need to understand that, biblically, belief in Christ is the bedrock prerequisite to salvation. And practice of belief in Christ, accepting Him as Saviour, removes us from the state of condemnation.

**Joh 3:18 He that believeth on him is not condemned:**

A child, or as the textbook author calls them, "unconscious infants" cannot believe on the Lord Jesus Christ nor call upon Him to save them. (Ro 10:13 & 14) Therefore, they cannot be saved, which is the prerequisite for baptism. (Acts 2:41; 8:12) A child is "innocent" and does not know the difference between good and evil. Therefore, they are not "saved" nor need they be, but are "safe" because where there is no knowledge of sin there is no imputation of the curse of hell following their physical death. And even their physical death has no sting because they have not the knowledge of sin. (Ro 5:13)

**1 Cor 15:55 O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?**

**1 Cor 15:56 The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law.**

Therefore, the textbook author is in error for suggesting that there is any such thing as a Sacrament and for promoting the unbiblical heresy of "infant baptism." In our basic First and Second Level courses you learned that millions of Christians were murdered because they refused to believe, or practice, infant baptism and the salvatory efficacy of any Sacrament. Salvation is by Christ alone and because they believed this, the biblical Christians have always rejected those two Catholic beliefs. It was only with the Reformation when the Protestant Churches were started to protest Rome that non-Catholics began to practice these two heretical beliefs. The reason is because they "protested" the Roman brand of Catholicism and started their own Churches practicing "reformed" Catholicism. And much of the heresies of Rome were brought out when the Protestants were forced by the Roman Catholic Church to break with Rome. Among these many heresies were the two discussed in this Note, Sacraments and Infant Baptism. The Christians that were never Roman Catholic nor Protestant Catholic, refused to bow to the doctrinal demands of either group. For their refusal to believe in and practice these two heresies along with other heresies, some 50,000,000 were murdered down through the millennia by the Roman Catholics and, later, by the Protestant Catholics. And they are still being persecuted today, worldwide.

The textbook author is a Protestant. Therefore we will have to include an "Editor's Note:" from time to time to correct some of the Catholic beliefs still practiced by the Protestants and taught and promoted by them.

Dr. T.E. VanBuskirk

ritors of His kingdom. He turned the rebuke of the disciples on themselves; He was as much displeased with them as they had been with the parents and children. "Suffer the little children," He said, in words which each of the Synoptists has preserved for us in all their immortal tenderness—"Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven." And when He had folded them in His arms, laid His hands upon them, and blessed them, He added once more His constantly needed, and therefore constantly repeated, warning, "Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of heaven as a little child, shall not enter therein."

When this beautiful and deeply instructive scene was over, St. Matthew tells us that He started on His way, probably for that new journey to the other Bethany of which we shall hear in the next chapter; and on this road occurred another incident, which impressed itself so deeply on the minds of the spectators that it, too, has been recorded by the Evangelists in a triple narrative.

A young man of great wealth and high position seems suddenly to have been seized with a conviction that he had hitherto neglected an invaluable opportunity, and that One who could alone explain to him the true meaning and mystery of life was already on His way to depart from among them. Determined, therefore, not to be too late, he came running, breathless, eager—in a way that surprised all who beheld it—and, prostrating himself before the feet of Jesus, exclaimed, "Good Master, what good thing shall I do that I may inherit life?"

If there was something attractive in the mingled impetuosity and humility of one so young and distinguished, yet so candid and earnest, there was in his question much that was objectionable. The notion that he could gain eternal life by "doing some good thing," rested on a basis radically false. If we may combine what seems to be the true reading of St. Matthew with the answer recorded in the other Evangelists, our Lord seems to have said to him, "Why askest thou me about the good? and why callest thou me good? One is the good, even God." He would as little accept the title "Good," as He would accept the title "Messiah," when given in a false sense. He would not be regarded as that mere "good Rabbi," to which, in these days, more than ever, men would reduce Him. So far, Jesus would show the youth that unless he came to Him as to one who was more than man, his entire address, as well as his entire question, was a mistake. No mere man can lay any other foundation than that which is laid, and if the ruler committed the error of simply admiring Jesus as a Rabbi of

pre-eminent sanctity, yet no Rabbi, however saintly, was accustomed to receive the title of "good," or prescribe any amulet for the preservation of a virtuous life. And in the same spirit, He continued "But if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments."

The youth had not expected a reply so obvious and so simple. He cannot believe that he is merely referred to the Ten Commandments, and so he asks, in surprise, "What sort of commandments?" Jesus, as the youth wanted to *do* something, tells him merely of those of the Second Table, for, as has been well remarked, "Christ sends the proud to the *Law*, and invites the *humble* to the *Gospel*." "Master," replied the young man in surprise, "all these have I observed from my youth." Doubtless in the mere letter he may have done so, as millions have; but he evidently knew little of all that those commandments had been interpreted by the Christ to mean. And Jesus, seeing his sincerity, looking on him loved him, and gave him one short crucial test of his real condition. He was not content with the common-place; he aspired after the heroical, or rather *thought* that he did; therefore Jesus gave him an heroic act to do. "One thing," He said, "thou lackest," and bade him go, sell all that he had, distribute it to the poor, and come and follow Him.

It was too much. The young ruler went away very sorrowful, grief in his heart, and a cloud upon his brow, for he had great possessions. He preferred the comforts of earth to the treasures of heaven, he would not purchase the things of eternity by abandoning those of time; he made, as Dante calls it, "the great refusal." And so he vanishes from the Gospel history; nor do the Evangelists know anything of him farther. But the sad stern imagination of the poet follows him, and there, among the myriads of those who are blown about like autumn leaves on the confines of the outer world, blindly following the flutter of a giddy flag, rejected by Heaven, despised even by hell, hateful alike to God and to his enemies, he sees

"l'ombra di colui  
Che fece per viltate il gran rifiuto."

DANTE, *Inferno*, iii. 60.

(The shade of him, who made through cowardice the great refusal.)

We may—I had almost said we must—hope and believe a fairer ending for one whom Jesus, as He looked on him, could love. But the failure of this youth to meet the test saddened Jesus, and looking round at His disciples, He said, "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of heaven." The words once more

struck them as very severe. Could then no good man be rich, no rich man be good? But Jesus only answered—softening the sadness and sternness of the words by the affectionate title “children”—“Children how hard it is to enter into the kingdom of God;” hard for *any one*, but, he added, with an earnest look at His disciples, and specially addressing Peter, as the Gospel according to the Hebrews tells us, “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.” They might well be amazed beyond measure. Was there then no hope for a Nicodemus, for a Joseph of Arimathæa? Assuredly there was. The teaching of Jesus about riches was as little Ebionite as His teaching about marriage was Essene. Things impossible to nature are possible to grace; things impossible to man are easy to God.

Then, with a touch—was it of complacency, or was it of despair?—Peter said, “Lo, we have forsaken all, and followed thee,” and either added or implied, In what respect, then, shall we be gainers? The answer of Jesus was at once a magnificent encouragement and a solemn warning. The encouragement was that there was no instance of self-sacrifice which would not, even in this world, and even in the midst of persecutions, receive its hundredfold increase in the harvest of spiritual blessings, and would in the world to come be rewarded by the infinite recompense of eternal life; the warning was that familiar one which they had heard before, that many of the first should be last, and the last first. And to impress upon them still more fully and deeply that the kingdom of heaven is not a matter of mercenary calculation or exact equivalent—that there could be no bargaining with the Heavenly Householder—that before the eye of God’s clearer and more penetrating judgment Gentiles might be admitted before Jews, and Publicans before Pharisees, and young converts before aged Apostles—He told them the memorable Parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard. That parable, amid its other lessons, involved the truth that, while all who serve God should not be defrauded of their just and full and rich reward, there could be in heaven no murmuring, no envyings, no jealous comparison of respective merits, no base strugglings for precedence, no miserable disputings as to who had performed the maximum of service or who had received the minimum of grace.