

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

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

“Fear not. Only believe.”

“It is I. Be not afraid.”

LESSON SIXTEEN

CHAPTER XXX.

THE DISCOURSE AT CAPERNAUM.

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

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

they had observed that the wind was contrary, and that no other boat but that of the Apostles had left the shore; they made sure, therefore, of finding Him somewhere on the hills above the plain. Yet when the morning dawned they saw no trace of Him either on plain or hill. Meanwhile some little boats—perhaps driven across by the same gale which had retarded the opposite course of the disciples—had arrived from Tiberias. They availed themselves of these to cross over to Capernaum; and there, already in the early morning, they found Him, after all the fatigues and agitations of yesterday—after the day of sad tidings and ceaseless toil, after the night of stormy solitude and ceaseless prayer—calmly seated, and calmly teaching, in the familiar synagogue.

“Rabbi, when didst thou get hither?” is the expression of their natural surprise; but it is met with perfect silence. The miracle of walking on the water was one of necessity and mercy; it in no way concerned them; it was not in any way intended for them; nor was it mainly or essentially as a worker of miracles that Christ wished to claim their allegiance or convince their minds. And, therefore, reading their hearts, knowing that they were seeking Him in the very spirit which He most disliked, He quietly drew aside the veil of perhaps half-unconscious hypocrisy which hid them from themselves, and reproached them for seeking Him only for what they could get from Him—“not because ye saw signs, but because ye ate of the loaves and were satisfied.” He who never rejected the cry of the sufferer, or refused to answer the question of the faithful—He who would never break the bruised reed, or quench the smoking flax—at once rejected the false eye-service of mean self-interest and vulgar curiosity. Yet He added for their sakes the eternal lesson, “Labour ye not for the meat which perisheth, but for the meat which remaineth to eternal life, which the Son of Man shall give you; for Him the Father—even God—hath sealed.”

It seems as if at first they were touched and ashamed. He had read their hearts aright, and they ask Him, “What are we to do that we may work the works of God?”

“*This* is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent.” “But what *sign* would Jesus give them that they should believe in Him? Their fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, which David had called bread from heaven.” The inference was obvious. Moses had given them manna from heaven. Jesus as yet—they hinted—had only given them barley loaves of earth. But if He

were the true Messiah, was He not, according to all the legends of their nation, to enrich and crown them, and to banquet them on pomegranates from Eden, and "a vineyard of red wine," and upon the flesh of Behemoth and Leviathan, and the great bird Bar Juchne? Might not the very psalm which they had quoted have taught them how worse than useless it would have been if Jesus had given them manna, which, in their coarse literalism, they supposed to be in reality angels' food? Is not David in that psalm expressly showing that to grant them one such blessing was only to make them ask greedily for more, and that if God had given their fathers more, it was only because "they believed not in God, and put not their trust in His help"? but "while the meat was yet in their mouths, the heavy wrath of God came upon them, and slew the mightiest of them, and smote down the chosen men that were in Israel." And does not David show that in spite of, and before, and after, this wrathful granting to them to the full of their own hearts' lusts, so far from believing and being humble, they only sinned yet more and more against Him, and provoked Him more and more? Had not all the past history of their nation proved decisively that faith must rest on deeper foundations than signs and miracles, and that the evil heart of unbelief must be stirred by nobler emotions than astonishment at the outstretched hand and the mighty arm?

But Jesus led them at once to loftier regions than those of historical conviction. He tells them that He who had given them the manna was not Moses, but God; and that the manna was only in poetic metaphor bread from heaven; but that His Father, the true giver, was giving them the true bread from heaven even now—even the bread of God which came down from heaven, and was giving life to the world.

Their minds still fastened to mere material images—their hopes still running on mere material benefits—they ask for this bread from heaven as eagerly as the woman of Samaria had asked for the water which quenches all thirst. "Lord, now and always give us this bread."

Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He that cometh to me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst;" and He proceeds to point out to them that He came to do the Father's will, and that His will was that all who came to His Son should have eternal life.

Then the old angry murmurs burst out again—not this time from

the vulgar-minded multitude, but from His old opponents the leading Jews—"How could He say that He came down from heaven? How could He call Himself the bread of life? Was He not Jesus, the son of Joseph, the carpenter of Nazareth?"

Jesus never met these murmurs about His supposed parentage and place of birth by revealing to the common crowds the high mystery of His earthly origin. He thought not equality with God a thing to be seized by Him. He was in no hurry to claim His own Divinity, or demand the homage which was its due. He would let the splendour of His Divine nature dawn on men gradually, not at first in all its noonday brightness, but gently as the light of morning through His word and works. In the fullest and deepest sense "*He emptied Himself of His glory.*"

But He met the murmurers, as He always did, by a stronger, fuller, clearer declaration of the very truth which they rejected. It was thus that He had dealt with Nicodemus; it was thus that He had taught the woman of Samaria; it was thus also that He answered the Temple doctors who arraigned His infringement of their sabbatic rules. But the timid Rabbi and the erring woman had been faithful enough and earnest enough to look deeper into His words and humbly seek their meaning, and so to be guided into truth. Not so with these listeners. God had drawn them to Christ, and they had rejected His gracious drawing without which they *could* not come. When Jesus reminded them that the manna was no life-giving substance, since their fathers had eaten thereof and were dead, but that He was Himself the bread of life, of which all who eat should live for ever; and when, in language yet more startling, He added that the bread was *His flesh* which He would give for the life of the world—then, instead of seeking the true significance of that deep metaphor, they made it a matter of mere verbal criticism, and only wrangled together about the idle question, "How can this man give us His flesh to eat?"

Thus they were carnally-minded, and to be carnally-minded is death. They did not seek the truth, and it was more and more taken from them. They had nothing, and therefore from them was taken even what they had. In language yet more emphatic, under figures yet more startling in their paradox, Jesus said to them, "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you;" and again, as a still further enforcement and expansion of the same great truths—"He that eateth of this bread shall live for ever."

* No doubt the words were difficult, and, to those who came in a hard and false spirit, offensive ; no doubt also the death and passion of our Saviour Christ, and the mystery of that Holy Sacrament, in which we spiritually eat His flesh and drink His blood, has enabled us more clearly to understand His meaning ; yet there was in the words which He had used, enough, and more than enough, to shadow forth to every attentive hearer the great truth, already familiar to them from their own Law, that “ Man doth not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God ; ” and the further truth that eternal life, the life of the soul, was to be found in the deepest and most intimate of all conceivable communions with the life and teaching of Him who spake. And it must be remembered that if the Lord’s Supper has, for us, thrown a clearer light upon the meaning of this discourse, on the other hand the metaphors which Jesus used had not, to an educated Jew, one-hundreth part of the strangeness which they have to us. Jewish literature was exceedingly familiar with the symbolism which represented by “ eating ” an entire acceptance of and incorporation with the truth, and by “ bread ” a spiritual doctrine. Even the mere pictorial genius of the Hebrew language gave the clue to the right interpretation. Those who heard Christ in the synagogue of Capernaum must almost involuntarily have recalled similar expressions in their own prophets ; and since the discourse was avowedly parabolic—since Jesus had expressly excluded all purely sensual and Judaic fancies—it is quite clear that much of their failure to comprehend Him arose not from the understanding, but from the will. His saying was hard, as St. Augustine remarks, only to the hard ; and incredible only to the incredulous. For if bread be the type of all *earthly* sustenance, then the “ bread of heaven ” may well express all *spiritual* sustenance, all that involves and supports eternal life. Now the lesson which He wished to teach them was *this*—that eternal life is in the Son of God. They, therefore, that would have eternal life must partake of the bread of heaven, or—to use the other and deeper image—must eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of Man. They must *feed on Him in their hearts by faith*. They might accept or reject the truth which He was revealing to their consciences, but there could be no possible excuse for their pretended incapacity to understand its meaning.

There is a teaching which is, and is intended to be, not only instructive but probationary ; of which the immediate purpose is not only to *teach*, but to *test*. Such had been the object of this memorable

discourse. To comprehend it rightly required an effort not only of the understanding, but also of the will. It was *meant* to put an end to the merely selfish hopes of that "rabble of obtrusive chiliasts" whose irreverent devotion was a mere cloak for worldliness; it was *meant* also to place before the Jewish authorities words which they were too full of hatred and materialism to understand. But its sifting power went deeper than this. Some even of the disciples found the saying harsh and repulsive. They did not speak out openly, but Jesus recognised their discontent, and when He had left the synagogue, spoke to them, in this third and concluding part of His discourse, at once more gently and less figuratively than He had done to the others. To these He prophesied of that future ascension, which should prove to them that He had indeed come down from heaven, and that the words about His flesh—which should then be taken into heaven—*could only have a figurative meaning*. Nay, with yet further compassion for their weakness, He intimated to them the significance of those strong metaphors in which He had purposely veiled His words from the curious eyes of selfishness and the settled malice of opposition. In one sentence which is surely the key-note of all that had gone before—in a sentence which surely renders nugatory much of the pseudo-mystical and impossibly-elaborate exegesis by which the plain meaning of this chapter has been obscured, He added—

"It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: *the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.*" Why then had they found His words so hard? He tells them: it was because some of them believed not; it was because, as He had already told the Jews, the spirit of faith is a gift and grace of God, which gifts these murmurers were rejecting, against which grace they were struggling even now.

And from that time many of them left Him; many who had hitherto sought Him, many who were not far from the kingdom of heaven. Even in the midst of crowds His life was to be lonelier thenceforth, because there would be fewer to know and love Him. In deep sadness of heart He addressed to the Twelve the touching question, "Will ye also go away?" It was Simon Peter whose warm heart spoke out impetuously for all the rest. He at least had rightly apprehended that strange discourse at which so many had stumbled. "Lord," he exclaims, "to whom shall we go? THOU HAST THE WORDS OF ETERNAL LIFE. But we believe and are sure that Thou art the Holy One of God."

It was a noble confession, but at that bitter moment the heart of Jesus was heavily oppressed, and He only answered—

“Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?”

The expression was terribly strong, and the absence of all direct parallels render it difficult for us to understand its exact significance. But although it was afterwards known that the reproach was aimed at Judas, yet it is doubtful whether at the actual time any were aware of this except the traitor himself.

Many false or half-sincere disciples had left Him: might not these words have been graciously meant to furnish one more opportunity to the hard and impure soul of the man of Kerioth, so that before being plunged into yet deeper and more irreparable guilt, *he* might leave Him too? If so, the warning was rejected. In deadly sin against his own conscience, Judas stayed to heap up for himself wrath “against the day of wrath, and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.”

CHAPTER XXXI.

GATHERING OPPOSITION.

ALTHOUGH the discourse which we have just narrated formed a marked period in our Lord's ministry, and although from this time forward the clouds gather more and more densely about His course, yet it must not be supposed that this was the first occasion, even in Galilee, on which enmity against His person and teaching had been openly displayed.

1. The earliest traces of doubt and disaffection arose from the expression which He used on several occasions, “Thy sins be forgiven thee.” It was in these words that He had addressed the woman that was a sinner, and the sick of the palsy. On both occasions the address had excited astonishment and disapproval, and at Simon's house, where this had found no *open* expression, and where no miracle had been wrought, Jesus gently substituted another expression. But it was not so at the healing of the palsied man; there an open murmur had risen among the Scribes and Pharisees; and there, revealing

more of His true majesty, Jesus, by His power of working miracles, had vindicated His right to forgive sins. The argument was unanswerable, for not only did the prevalent belief connect sickness in every instance with actual sin, but also it was generally maintained, even by the Rabbis, "that no sick man is healed from his disease until all his sins have been forgiven." It was, therefore, in full accordance with their own notions that He who by His own authority could heal diseases could also by His own authority pronounce that sins were forgiven. It was true that they could hardly conceive of either healing or forgiveness conveyed in such irregular channels, and without the paraphernalia of sacrifices, and without the need of sacerdotal interventions. But, disagreeable as such proceedings were to their well-regulated minds, the fact remained that the cures were actually wrought, and were actually attested by hundreds of living witnesses. It was felt, therefore, that this ground of opposition was wholly untenable, and it was tacitly abandoned. To urge that there was "blasphemy" in His expressions would only serve to bring into greater prominence that there was miracle in His acts.

2. Nor, again, do they seem to have pressed the charge, preserved for us only by our Lord's own allusion, that He was "a glutton and a wine-drinker." The charge was far too flagrantly false and malicious to excite any prejudice against one who, although He did not adopt the stern asceticism of John, yet lived a life of the extremest simplicity, and merely did what was done by the most scrupulous Pharisees in accepting the invitations to feasts, where He had constantly fresh opportunities of teaching and doing good. The calumny was, in fact, destroyed when He had shown that the men of that generation were like wayward and peevish children whom nothing could conciliate, charging Jesus with intemperance because He did not avoid an innocent festivity, and John with demoniac possession because he set his face against social corruptions.

3. Nor, once more, did they press the charge of His not fasting. In making that complaint they had hoped for the powerful aid of John's disciples; but when these had been convinced, by the words of their own prophet, how futile and unreasonable was their complaint, the Pharisees saw that it was useless to found a charge upon the neglect of a practice which was not only unrecognised in the Mosaic law, but which some of their own noblest and wisest teachers had not encouraged. The fact that Jesus did not require His disciples to fast would certainly cause no forfeiture of the popular sympathy, and

could not be urged to His discredit even before a synagogue or a Sanhedrin.

4. A deeper and more lasting offence was caused, and a far more deadly opposition stimulated, by Christ's choice of Matthew as an Apostle, and by His deliberate tolerance of—it might almost be said preference for—the society of publicans and sinners. Among the Jews of that day the distinctions of religious life created a barrier almost as strong as that of caste. No less a person than Hillel had said that “no ignorant person could save himself from sin, and no *‘man of the people’* be pious.” A scrupulous Jew regarded the multitude of his own nation who “knew not the Law” as accursed; and just as every Jew, holding himself to be a member of a royal generation and a peculiar people, looked on the heathen world with the sovereign disdain of an exclusiveness founded on the habits of a thousand years, so the purist faction regarded their more careless and offending brethren as being little, if at all, better than the very heathen. Yet here was One who mingled freely and familiarly—mingled without one touch of hauteur or hatred—among offensive publicans and flagrant sinners. Nay, more, He suffered women, out of whom had been cast seven devils, to accompany Him in His journeys, and ^{*}harlots to bathe His feet with tears! How different from the Pharisees, who held that there was pollution in the mere touch of those who had themselves been merely touched by the profane populace, and who had laid down the express rule that no one ought to receive a guest into his house if he suspected him of being a sinner.

Early in His ministry, Jesus, with a divine and tender irony, had met the accusation by referring them to His favourite passage of Scripture—that profound utterance of the prophet Hosea, of which He bade them “go and learn” the meaning—“I will have mercy and not sacrifices.” He had further rebuked at once their unkindliness and their self-satisfaction by the proverb, “They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.” The objection did not, however, die away. In His later days, when He was journeying to Jerusalem, these incessant enemies again raised the wrathful and scornful murmur, “This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them;” and then it was that Jesus answered them and justified His ways, and revealed more clearly and more lovingly than had ever been done before the purpose of God's love towards repentant sinners, in those three exquisite and memorable parables, the lost sheep, the lost piece of money, and, above all, the prodigal son. Drawn from the simplest elements of daily

* Once again, there is no biblical proof that Mary Magdalene was a harlot. No matter how prevalent the belief down through history that she was, it is nowhere stated in Scripture that it was so. Dr. VBK

experience, these parables, and the last especially, illustrated, and illustrated for ever, in a rising climax of tenderness, the deepest mysteries of the Divine compassion—the joy that there is in heaven over one sinner that repenteth. Where, in the entire range of human literature, sacred or profane, can anything be found so terse, so luminous, so full of infinite tenderness—so faithful in the picture which it furnishes of the consequences of sin, yet so merciful in the hope which it affords to amendment and penitence—as this little story? How does it summarise the consolations of religion and the sufferings of life! All sin and punishment, all penitence and forgiveness, find their best delineation in these few brief words. The radical differences of temperament and impulse which separate different classes of men—the spurious independence of a restless free-will—the preference of the enjoyments of the present to all hopes of the future—the wandering far away from that pure and peaceful region which is indeed our home, in order to let loose every lower passion in the riotous indulgence which wastes and squanders the noblest gifts of life—the brief continuance of those fierce spasms of forbidden pleasure—the consuming hunger, the scorching thirst, the helpless slavery, the unutterable degradation, the uncompassionated anguish that must inevitably ensue—where have these myriad-times-repeated experiences of sin and sorrow been ever painted—though here painted in a few touches only—by a hand more tender and more true than in the picture of that foolish boy demanding prematurely the share which he claims of his father's goods; journeying into a far country, wasting his substance with riotous living; suffering from want in the mighty famine; forced to submit to the foul infamy of feeding swine, and fain to fill his belly with the swine-husks which no man gave. And then the coming to himself, the memory of his father's meanest servants who had enough and to spare, the return homewards, the agonised confession, the humble, contrite, heartbroken entreaty, and that never-to-be-equalled climax which, like a sweet voice from heaven, has touched so many million hearts to penitence and tears—

“And he arose and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off his father saw him and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to the servants, Bring forth the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet: and bring hither the fatted calf and kill it; and let us eat and

be merry: for this my son was dead and is alive again, was lost and is found.”

And since no strain could rise into sweeter and nobler tenderness—since death itself could reveal no lovelier or more consolatory lesson than it conveys to sinful man—to us it might seem that this is the true climax of the parable, and that here it *should* end as with the music of angel harps. And here it would have ended had the mystery of human malice and perversity been other than it is. But the conclusion of it bears most directly on the very circumstances that called it forth. The angry murmur of the Pharisees and Scribes had shown how utterly ignorant they were, in their cold dead hardness and pride of heart, that, in the sight of God, the tear of one truly repentant sinner is transcendently dearer than the loveless and fruitless formalism of a thousand Pharisees. Little did they suspect that penitence can bring the very harlot and publican into closer communion with their Maker than the combined excellence of a thousand vapid and respectable hypocrisies. And therefore it was that Jesus added how the elder son came in, and was indignant at the noise of merriment, and was angry at that ready forgiveness, and reproached the tender heart of his father, and dragged up again in their worst form the forgiven sins of this brother whom he would not acknowledge, and showed all the narrow unpardoning malignity of a heart which had mistaken external rectitude for holy love. Such self-righteous malice, such pitiless and repulsive want of love, is an evil more inveterate—a sore more difficult to probe, and more hard to cure—than open disobedience and passionate sin. And truly, when we read this story, and meditate deeply over all that it implies, we may, from our hearts, thank God that He who can bring good out of the worst evil—honey out of the slain lion, and water out of the flinty rock—could, even from an exhibition of such a spirit as this, draw His materials for the divinest utterance of all revelation—the parable of the prodigal son.

The relation of Jesus to publicans and sinners was thus explained, and also the utter antagonism between His spirit and that inflated religionism which is the wretched and hollow counterfeit of all *real* religion. The Judaism of that day substituted empty forms and meaningless ceremonies for true righteousness; it mistook uncharitable exclusiveness for genuine purity; it delighted to sun itself in the injustice of an imagined favouritism from which it would fain have shut out all God's other children; it was so profoundly hypocritical as not even to recognise its own hypocrisy; it never thought so well

of itself as when it was crushing the broken reed and trampling out the last spark from the smoking flax; it thanked God for the very sins of others, and thought that He could be pleased with a service in which there was neither humility nor truthfulness, nor loyalty, nor love. These poor formalists, who thought that they were so rich and increased with goods, had to learn that they were wretched, and poor, and miserable, and blind, and naked. These sheep, which fancied that they had not strayed, had to understand that the poor *lost* sheep might be carried home on the shoulders of the Good Shepherd with a yet deeper tenderness; these elder sons had to learn that their Father's spirit, however little they might be able to realise it in their frozen unsympathetic hearts, was *this*: "It was meet that we should make merry and be glad, for this *thy* brother was dead and is alive again, was lost and is found."

5. But however much it might be manifest that the spirit of the Christ and the spirit of the Pharisee were irreconcilably opposed to each other, yet up to this point the enemies of Jesus were unable to ruin His influence or check His work. To forgive, with the same word which healed the diseases, the sins by which they believed all diseases to be caused—to join in social festivities—to associate with publicans and sinners—were not, and could not be construed into, offences against the law. But a weightier charge, more persistently reiterated, more violently resented, remained behind—a charge of distinctly violating the express laws of Moses by non-observance of the Sabbath. This it was which caused a surprise, an exacerbation, a madness, a thirst for sanguinary vengeance, which pursued Him to the very cross. For the Sabbath was a Mosaic, nay, even a primeval institution, and it had become the most distinctive and the most passionately revered of all the ordinances which separated the Jew from the Gentile as a peculiar people. It was at once the sign of their exclusive privileges, and the centre of their barren formalism. Their traditions, their patriotism, even their obstinacy, were all enlisted in its scrupulous maintenance. Not only had it been observed in heaven before man was, but they declared that the people of Israel had been chosen for the sole purpose of keeping it. Was it not even miraculously kept by the Sabbatical river of the Holy City? Their devotion to it was only deepened by the universal ridicule, inconvenience, and loss which it entailed upon them in the heathen world. They were even proud that, from having observed it with a stolid literalism, they had suffered themselves on that day to lose battles, to

be cut to pieces by their enemies, to see Jerusalem itself imperilled and captured. Its observance had been fenced round by the minutest, the most painfully precise, the most ludicrously insignificant restrictions. The Prophet had called it "a delight," and therefore it was a duty even for the poor to eat three times on that day. They were to feast on it, though no fire was to be lighted and no food cooked. According to the stiff and narrow school of Shammai, no one on the Sabbath might even comfort the sick or enliven the sorrowful. Even the preservation of life was a breaking of the Sabbath; and, on the other hand, even to kill a flea was as bad as to kill a camel. Had not the command to "do no manner of work upon the Sabbath day" been most absolute and most emphatic? had not Moses himself and all the congregation caused a man in the wilderness to be stoned to death for merely gathering sticks upon it? had not the Great Synagogue itself drawn up the thirty-nine *abhôth* and quite innumerable *toldôth*, or prohibitions of labours which violated it in the first or in the second degree? Yet here was One, claiming to be a prophet, yea, and more than a prophet, deliberately setting aside, as it seemed to them, the traditional sanctity of that day of days! Every attentive reader of the Gospels will be surprised to find how large a portion of the enmity and opposition which our Lord excited, not only in Jerusalem, but even in Galilee and in Peræa, turned upon this point alone.

The earliest outbreak of the feeling in Galilee must have occurred shortly after the events narrated in the last chapter. The feeding of the five thousand, and the discourse in the synagogue of Capernaum, took place immediately before a Passover. None of the Evangelists narrate the events which immediately succeeded. If Jesus attended this Passover, He must have done so in strict privacy and seclusion, and no single incident of His visit has been recorded. It is more probable that the peril and opposition which He had undergone in Jerusalem were sufficient to determine His absence "until this tyranny was overpast." It is not, however impossible that, if He did not go in person, some at least of His disciples fulfilled this national obligation; and it may have been an observation of their behaviour, combined with the deep hatred inspired by His bidding the healed man take up his bed on the Sabbath day, and by the ground which He had taken in defending Himself against that charge, which induced the Scribes and Pharisees of Jerusalem to send some of their number to follow His steps, and to keep an espionage upon His actions, even by the shores of His own beloved lake. Certain it is that henceforth, at

every turn and every period of His career—in the corn-fields, in synagogues, in feasts, during journeys, at Capernaum, at Magdala, in Peræa, at Bethany—we find Him dogged, watched, impeded, reproached, questioned, tempted, insulted, conspired against by these representatives of the leading authorities of His nation, of whom we are repeatedly told that they were not natives of the place, but “certain which came from Jerusalem.”

i. The first attack in Galilee arose from the circumstance that, in passing through the corn-fields on the Sabbath day, His disciples, who were suffering from hunger, plucked the ears of corn, rubbed them in the palms of their hands, blew away the chaff, and ate. Undoubtedly, this was a very high offence—even a capital offence—in the eyes of the Legalists. To reap and to thresh on the Sabbath were of course forbidden by one of the *abhôth*, or primary rules; but the Rabbis had decided that to pluck corn was to be construed as reaping, and to rub it as threshing; even to walk on grass was forbidden, because that too was a species of threshing; and not so much as a fruit must be plucked from a tree. All these latter acts were violations of the *toldôth*, or “derivative rules.” Perhaps these spying Pharisees had followed Jesus on this Sabbath day to watch whether He would go more than the prescribed *techûm ha-Shabbeth*, or Sabbath-day’s journey of two thousand cubits; but here they had been fortunate enough to light upon a far more heinous and flagrant scandal—an act of the disciples which, strictly and technically speaking, rendered them liable to death by stoning. Jesus Himself had not indeed shared in the offence. If we may press the somewhat peculiar expression of St. Mark, He was walking along through the cornfields by the ordinary path, bearing His hunger as best He might, while the disciples were pushing for themselves a road through the standing corn by plucking the ears as they went along. Now there was no harm whatever in plucking the ears; *that* was not only sanctioned by custom, but even distinctly permitted by the Mosaic law. But the heinous fact was that this should be done *on a Sabbath!* Instantly the Pharisees are round our Lord, pointing to the disciples with the angry question, “See! why do *they*” —with a contemptuous gesture towards the disciples—“do that which is not lawful on the Sabbath day?”

With that divine and instantaneous readiness, with that depth of insight and width of knowledge which characterised His answers to the most sudden surprises, Jesus instantly protected His disciples with personal approval and decisive support. As the charge this time

was aimed not at Himself but at His disciples, His line of argument and defence differs entirely from that which, as we have seen, He had adopted at Jerusalem. *There* He rested His supposed violation of the law on His personal authority; *here*, while He again declared Himself Lord of the Sabbath, He instantly quoted first from their own *Cethubhîm*, then from their own law, a precedent and a principle which absolved His followers from all blame. "Have ye not read," He asked, adopting perhaps with a certain delicate irony, as He did at other times, a favourite formula of their own Rabbis, "how David not only went with his armed followers into the Temple on the Sabbath day, but actually ate with them the sanctified shewbread, which it was expressly forbidden for any but the priests to eat?" If David, their hero, their favourite, their saint, had thus openly and flagrantly violated the letter of the law, and had yet been blameless on the sole plea of a necessity higher than any merely ceremonial injunction, why were the disciples to blame for the harmless act of sating their hunger? And again, if their own Rabbis had laid it down that there was "no Sabbatism in the Temple;" that the priests on the Sabbath might hew the wood, and light the fires, and place hot fresh-baked shewbread on the table, and slay double victims, and circumcise children, and thus in every way violate the rules of the *Sopherîm* about the Sabbath, and yet be blameless—nay, if in acting thus they were breaking the Sabbath at the bidding of the very Law which ordains the Sabbath—then if the Temple excuses *them*, ought not something greater than the Temple to excuse these? And there was something greater than the Temple here. And then once more He reminds them that mercy is better than sacrifice. Now the Sabbath was expressly designed for mercy, and therefore not only might all acts of mercy be blamelessly performed thereon, but such acts would be more pleasing to God than all the insensate and self-satisfied scrupulosities which had turned a rich blessing into a burden and a snare. The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath, and therefore the Son of Man is Lord also of the Sabbath.

* In the Codex Bezae, an ancient and valuable manuscript now in the University Library at Cambridge, there occurs after Luke vi. 5 this remarkable addition—"On the same day, seeing one working on the Sabbath, He said to him, *O man, if indeed thou knowest what thou doest, thou art blessed; but if thou knowest not, thou art accursed, and a transgressor of the law.*" The incident is curious; it is preserved for us in this manuscript alone, and it may perhaps be set aside as

*** Such extra-biblical stories should not be considered Scriptural. Anything not from the Scriptures are mere flights of fancy to be ignored. Dr. VBK**

apocryphal, or at best as one of those *ἀγγραφα δόγματα*, or “unrecorded sayings” which, like Acts xx. 35, are attributed to our Lord by tradition only. Yet the story is too striking, too intrinsically probable, to be at once rejected as unauthentic. Nothing could more clearly illustrate the spirit of our Lord’s teaching, as it was understood, for instance, by St. Paul. For the meaning of the story obviously is—If thy work is of faith, then thou art acting rightly: if it is not of faith, it is sin. **Although the precept is biblical, the story itself is not. Dr. VBK**

ii. It was apparently on the day signalled by this bitter attack that our Lord again, later in the afternoon, entered the synagogue. A man—tradition says that he was a stonemason, maimed by an accident, who had prayed Christ to heal him, that he might not be forced to beg—was sitting in the synagogue. His presence, and apparently the purpose of His presence, was known to all; and in the chief seats were Scribes, Pharisees, and Herodians, whose jealous malignant gaze was fixed on Christ to see what he would do, that they might accuse Him. He did not leave them long in doubt. First He bade the man with the withered hand get up and stand out in the midst. And then he referred to the adjudication of their own consciences the question that was in their hearts, formulating it only in such a way as to show them its real significance. “Is it lawful,” He asked, “on the Sabbath days to do good or to do evil? to save life (as I am doing), or to kill (as you in your hearts are wishing to do)?” There could be but one answer to such a question, but they were not there either to search for or to tell the truth. Their sole object was to watch what He would do, and found upon it a public charge before the Sanhedrin, or if not, at least to brand Him thenceforth with the open stigma of a Sabbath-breaker. Therefore they met the question by stolid and impotent silence. But He would not allow them to escape the verdict of their own better judgment, and therefore He justified Himself by their own distinct practice, no less than by their inability to answer. “Is there one of you,” He asked, “who, if but a single sheep be fallen into a water-pit, will not get hold of it, and pull it out? How much then is a man better than a sheep?” The argument was unanswerable, and their own conduct in the matter was undeniable; but still their fierce silence remained unbroken. He looked round on them with anger; a holy indignation burned in His heart, glowed on His countenance, animated His gesture, rang in His voice, as slowly He swept each hard upturned face with the glance that upbraided them for their malignity and meanness, for their ignorance and pride; and then

suppressing that bitter and strong emotion as He turned to do His deed of mercy, He said to the man, "Stretch forth thy hand." Was not the hand withered? How could he stretch it forth? The word of Christ supplied the power to fulfil His command: He stretched it out, and it was restored whole as the other.

Thus in every way were His enemies foiled—foiled in argument, shamed into silence, thwarted even in their attempt to find some ground for a criminal accusation. For even in healing the man, Christ had done absolutely nothing which their worst hostility could misconstrue into a breach of the Sabbath law. He had not touched the man; He had not questioned him; He had not bid him exercise his recovered power; He had but spoken a word, and not even a Pharisee could say that to speak a word was an infraction of the Sabbath, even if the word were followed by miraculous blessing! They must have felt how utterly they were defeated, but it only kindled their rage the more. They were filled with madness, and communed one with another what they might do to Jesus. Hitherto they had been enemies of the Herodians. They regarded them as half-apostate Jews, who accepted the Roman domination, imitated heathen practices, adopted Sadducean opinions, and had gone so far in their flattery to the reigning house that they had blasphemously tried to represent Herod the Great as the promised Messiah. But now their old enmities were reconciled in their mad rage against a common foe. Something—perhaps the fear of Antipas, perhaps political suspicion, perhaps the mere natural hatred of worldlings and renegades against the sweet and noble doctrines which shamed their lives—had recently added these Herodians to the number of the Saviour's persecutors. As Galilee was the chief centre of Christ's activity, the Jerusalem Pharisees were glad to avail themselves of any aid from the Galilæan tetrarch and his followers. They took common counsel how they might destroy by violence the Prophet whom they could neither refute by reasoning nor circumvent by law.

This enmity of the leaders had not yet estranged from Christ the minds of the multitude. It made it desirable, however, for Him to move to another place, because He would "neither strive nor cry, neither should any man hear His voice in the street," and the hour was not yet come when He should "send forth judgment to victory." But before His departure there occurred scenes yet more violent, and outbreaks of fury against Him yet more marked and dangerous. Every day it became more and more necessary to show that the rift

between Himself and the religious leaders of His nation was deep and final; every day it became more and more necessary to expose the hypocritical formalism which pervaded their doctrines, and which was but the efflorescence of a fatal and deeply-seated plague.

6. His first distinct denunciation of the principles that lay at the very basis of the Pharisaic system was caused by another combined attempt of the Jerusalem Scribes to damage the position of His disciples. On some occasion they had observed that the disciples had sat down to a meal without previous ablutions. Now these ablutions were insisted upon with special solemnity by the Oral Tradition. The Jews of later times related with intense admiration how the Rabbi Akiba, when imprisoned and furnished with only sufficient water to maintain life, would have preferred to die of starvation rather than eat without the proper washings. The Pharisees, therefore, coming up to Jesus as usual in a body, ask Him, with a swelling sense of self-importance at the justice of their reproach, "Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread."

Before giving our Lord's reply, St. Mark pauses to tell us that the traditional ablutions observed by the Pharisees and all the leading Jews were extremely elaborate and numerous. Before every meal, and at every return from market, they washed "with the fist," and if no water was at hand a man was obliged to go at least four miles to search for it. Besides this there were precise rules for the washing of all cups and *sextarii* and banquet-couches (*triclinia*) and brazen vessels. The treatise *Shûlchan-Arûk*, or "Table arranged," a compendium of Rabbinical usages drawn up by Josef Karo in 1567, contains no less than twenty-six prayers by which these washings were accompanied. To neglect them was as bad as homicide, and involved a forfeiture of eternal life. And yet the disciples dared to eat with "common" (that is, with unwashed) hands!

As usual, our Lord at once made common cause with His disciples, and did not leave them, in their simplicity and ignorance, to be overawed by the attack of these stately and sanctimonious critics. He answered their question by a far graver one. "Why," He said, "do you too violate the commandment of God by this 'tradition' of yours? For God's command was, 'Honour thy father and thy mother;' but your gloss is, instead of giving to father and mother, a man may simply give the sum intended for their support to the sacred treasury, and say, 'It is *Corban*,' and then—he is exempt from any further burden

in their support! And many such things ye do. Ye hypocrites!"—it was the first time that our Lord had thus sternly rebuked them—"finely do ye abolish and obliterate the commandment of God *by your traditions*; and well did Isaiah prophesy of you, 'This people honoureth Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me; but in vain do they worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandment of men.'"

This was not only a defence of the disciples—because it showed that they merely neglected a body of regulations which were in themselves so opposed to the very letter of the sacred law as, in many cases, to be more honoured in the breach than the observance—but it was the open rebuke of One who assumed a superior and fearless authority, and a distinct reprobation of a system which guided all the actions of the Rabbinic caste, and was more revered than the Pentateuch itself. The quintessence of that system was to sacrifice the spirit to the letter, which, apart from that spirit, was more than valueless; and to sacrifice the letter itself to mere inferences from it which were absolutely pernicious. The Jews distinguished between the written Law (*Torah Shebeketeb*) and the traditional Law, or "Law upon the lip" (*Torah Shebeal pîh*); and the latter was asserted, by its more extravagant votaries, to have been orally delivered by God to Moses, and orally transmitted by him through a succession of elders. On it is founded the Talmud (or "doctrine"), which consists of the Mishna (or "repetition") of the Law, and the Gemara, or "supplement" to it; and so extravagant did the reverence for the Talmud become, that it was said to be, in relation to the Law, as wine to water; to read the Scriptures was a matter of indifference, but to read the Mishna was meritorious, and to read the Gemara would be to receive the richest recompense. And it was this grandiose system of revered commentary and pious custom which Jesus now so completely discountenanced, as not only to defend the neglect of it, but even openly to condemn and repudiate its most established principles. He thus consigned to oblivion and indifference the entire paraphernalia of *Hagadôth* ("legends") and *Halachôth* ("rules"), which, though up to that period it had not been committed to writing, was yet devoutly cherished in the memory of the learned, and constituted the very treasury of Rabbinic wisdom.

Nor was this all: not content with shattering the very bases of their external religion, He even taught to the multitude doctrines which would undermine their entire authority—doctrines which would tend to bring their vaunted wisdom into utter discredit. The supre-

macy of His disapproval was in exact proportion to the boundlessness of their own arrogant self-assertion ; and turning away from them as though they were hopeless, He summoned the multitude, whom they had trained to look up to them as little gods, and spoke these short and weighty words :

“Hear me, all of you, and understand ! Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth the man ; but that which cometh out of the mouth, *that* defileth a man.”

The Pharisees were bitterly offended by this saying, as well indeed they might be. Condemnatory as it was of the too common sacerdotal infatuation for all that is merely ceremonial, that utterance of Jesus should have been the final death-knell of that superfluity of voluntary ceremonialism for which one of the Fathers coins the inimitable word *ἑθελοπερισσοθήσκεια*. His disciples were not slow to inform Him of the indignation which His words had caused, for they probably retained a large share of the popular awe for the leading sect. But the reply of Jesus was an expression of calm indifference to earthly judgment, a reference of all worth to the sole judgment of God as shown in the slow ripening of events. “Every plant which my Heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted up. Let them alone. They be blind leaders of the blind ; and if the blind lead the blind, shall they not both fall into the ditch ?”

A little later, when they were in-doors and alone, Peter ventured to ask for an explanation of the words which He had uttered so emphatically to the multitude. Jesus gently blamed the want of comprehension among His Apostles, but showed them, in teaching of deep significance, that man’s food does but affect his material structure, and does not enter into his heart, or touch his real being ; but that “from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, theft, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness.”

“These are the things which defile a man ; but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man.”

“*This He said,*” adds St. Mark, “*making all meats clean.*” In other words, this—which is obscured in our Authorised Version—was the most distinctive of all His utterances to prove the annulment and abrogation of the whole ceremonial law. In these words He anticipated by His own sovereign authority the decision which it cost St. Paul the best years of his life to force upon the obstinate traditionalism of Jewish converts.