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THE SHADOW  
OF THE CROSS  
IN  
OUR LORD'S MINISTRY



REV. H. A. BIRKS

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*The Shadow of the Cross*  
*in*  
*Our Lord's Ministry*

**Six Short Addresses**

*DELIVERED IN CHIGWELL CHURCH*

BY THE

REV. H. A. BIRKS

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**“And a man shall be as an hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest ; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.”**

**ISAIAH xxxii. 2.**

## I. THE SHADOW AT THE FESTIVAL.

### OUR LORD'S FOREKNOWLEDGE OF HIS SUFFERING.

*Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come.*—ST. JOHN ii. 4.

HE subject I have chosen for our special meditation is "the Shadow of the Cross in our Lord's Ministry." You will all recognize from whence the title is derived. You are most likely more or less familiar with the great picture of the painter Holman Hunt, entitled "The Shadow of the Cross." There is the carpenter's shop at Nazareth, and Jesus, the carpenter, for so He is called by St. Mark, is resting from His toil, and stretching out His arms in a pause from labour, while the light that falls upon His figure casts the dark shadow of a cross upon the wall.

The life of Jesus in His years at Nazareth is shrouded in deep mystery. We know He grew in wisdom, that is all. The secret things belong to God: we may not get behind the silence of the Scriptures, we may not lift the Providential veil;



we may not say when first the consciousness of all that was to come to Him was vividly before the human mind of Christ.

We may be sure that shadows fell across His childhood, presentiments of evil still awaiting Him. No wholly sinless child could live amid a naughty world like ours, without a weight of sorrow falling at times upon his soul. But these are griefs of which we must remain in ignorance. We cannot give them either form or substance. The fancy of the painter may give a hint to us, but that is all. The secret things belong to God, but the things that are revealed to us and to our children.

When we pass onward to our Saviour's ministry the case is different. There we have the clear warrant of Scripture: there, in our Lord's recorded words—windows are opened to us through which we may gaze with deepest reverence upon the inmost soul of the Incarnate Word of God: there we may see Him, not as in the fancy of the painter, with His own back toward the shadow, but boldly facing and confronting it, Himself the only light amid the gloom.

Although we may not tell at what time the perfect knowledge of all He had to suffer was first presented clearly to His view, one thing is plain to us, that at the time He came into the full glare of publicity at the commencement of His ministry, the whole was known. Some have surmised that in the deadly conflict in the wilderness after His

Baptism, He first learned to know fully the whole strength and the whole malice of the enemy who put forth all his power for His overthrow, and we may certainly perceive that in that awful combat there was a clear rehearsal of every trial and temptation that awaited Him upon His future course. The devil left no bolt unhurled against His stainless innocence, and at the close of the great fight departed "for a season." None knew so surely as our Lord Himself that Satan was intending to return, that His withdrawal meant a respite only, not entire rest. Last year we pondered on that conflict with the Evil one<sup>1</sup>, now I would have you fix your eyes upon the intervening years of ministry, and mark in a few striking instances how, sharply-outlined, the shadow of the Cross fell backward on the years that lay between the wilderness of His temptation and the Cross of Calvary.

To-day our subject is, the certainty of Christ's foreknowledge of His sufferings from the commencement of His ministry, and the remaining lectures will comprise :—Foreshadowing of Human Opposition ; the Knowledge of our Lord contrasted with the ignorance of His own chosen followers ; the Mount of Glory and the Mount of Suffering ; the Face set Zionwards ; the Home at Bethany.

The whole will lead us onward from the wilder-

<sup>1</sup> The substance of these lectures is contained in a little book, "God's Champion, Man's Example" (R. T. S., 1891).

ness of trial to the very eve of Christ's triumphal entry to Jerusalem to suffer and to die.

The shadow on the festival. "Mine hour is not yet come." This is the first clear intimation that our Lord was looking forward to His final hour. We might indeed go back yet earlier. When Christ returned from His temptation He came to Jordan where John was baptizing: and Dr. Edersheim has pointed out by powerful, perhaps convincing, arguments that Friday was the day of His return—the day on which the Baptist said to His disciples, "Behold the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world"—a Friday the commencement of His ministry, a Friday its terrible close. If it were certain that the Saviour had overheard the Baptist's striking proclamation, here would no doubt be found the earliest shadow of the coming Sacrifice, but as the narrative leaves room for doubt of this we hasten onwards to the marriage festival at Cana.

You know the joyousness of the occasion, how Christ was there as the dispenser of all happiness, the soul of mirth, the centre of all brightness, the sympathizing loving cheerful friend: and it is strange to think the shadow of His cross of shame fell dark across that hour of His festivity. Yet it was even so. "Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come."

True, there are those who would explain the

phrase as meaning nothing more than this, "Wait a few moments longer before I can perform My miracle ;" but surely the interpretation is but a shallow one that sees in this deep utterance of Jesus no more than this. On every other occasion when our Lord speaks of His hour, it means the hour of His death, the hour of His departure to His Father, the hour in one sense of His greatest glory, the fullest triumph of His perfect love.

The words may, doubtless, in their simplest meaning have applied to the moment's need, and in that sense His mother may have understood them. Not thy time, but Mine must I choose for this great exhibition of My power: My silent subjection at Nazareth is over, My public work, with which no private interest, however close, may interfere must now begin. But surely far behind all this there was a sadder deeper thought as well.

You can picture (can you not?) the eager longing of the Blessed Virgin, who for so many years had watched her Son in His obscurity, and pondered on His spotless life, and treasured in her heart His pregnant words. She knew Him as none other knew ; she had the secret of His origin ; she saw the tokens of His greatness. It must have been a strange surprise to her that He had lived so long and so unrecognised ; but now at last His day began to dawn. She saw Him with a little band of followers devoted to His cause. He had appeared at last before the world of men. The

mighty prophet of the Jordan, who swayed all hearts as trees before the wind, had pointed to Him, owned Him, declared Him even greater than himself—perhaps she had not fully pondered the nature of the witness borne to Him, it only seemed to her the dawn of a new era in which the greatness of her Son should have its due. The thought of Jesus was far different. For from the first He saw her (may we not believe it?) standing in bitterness beneath His cross of shame. There is a touch of pathos in His utterance. Oh! why this eagerness to push Me into prominence? how little dost thou know what it involves, the cost, the pain, the sacrifice! Those thoughts of thine ambition must be mortified: “Woman, what have I to do with thee?” our thoughts lie far asunder as the poles, “Mine hour is not yet come.”

If this be really what was in the mind of Jesus, how much more gracious it makes the unembarrassed freedom and kindness of the miracle. The stamp of death already on His forehead, the sentence of His condemnation already written in His heart, He is at leisure from Himself to soothe and sympathize. He is abandoned to the present joy.

Now if the words above stood utterly alone, they might not be sufficient to bear out this view; or, if they still appealed to the believer in our Lord's omniscience, would have but little weight with one who was but groping amid uncertainties toward the light of day. The words are not alone, or unsup-

ported, as proof of the complete foreknowledge of our Lord ; complete, however, He had come by it. On the same page of my Bible as it lies open before me I see two other sentences that bear it out with strange significance: the one "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up ;" the other, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." Both these two sayings came at the very opening of His ministry—one to the Jews, one to the timid rabbi Nicodemus ; they show His knowledge of the very manner of His death, they show His knowledge of the very interval between His death and resurrection. It is true that our Lord was not understood in either utterance. He dropped the words as seed to bear fruit afterwards. To us in our long retrospect they have a special interest. They show that every word of love and every act of grace in our Lord's ministry was spoken or was wrought by one who had most clearly written in His heart the sentence of His own most wrongful condemnation, the hope and certainty of His own final victory.

And now what is the practical outcome of such thoughts as these to me? What lessons may I gather for my life? The time can never be misspent in which we learn to estimate more duly the greatness of our Saviour's sacrifice, the grace of His humility. If beyond this we may not be

content without a lesson for our own immediate use, may we not find it here?—to suffer no future evil (no vague forebodings certainly, of troubles that may never come) to interfere with our fulfilment of the work to hand. Our Lord had no vague terror, but a certain foresight of evil in advance upon His way. He resolutely thrust the thought away from Him so far as it might interfere with present cheerfulness, with patient ministry to present need. If half the time we spend in brooding over unformed possibilities of future evil were resolutely spent in bettering the evils close at hand—the times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord would never be so long delayed, and the great restitution of all things might be the fact of to-day, instead of merely, as it is, the dream of the remotest future.

“Father, I know that all my life  
Is portioned out for me,  
And the changes that are sure to come  
I do not fear to see ;  
But I ask Thee for a present mind  
Intent on pleasing Thee.

There are briars besetting every path  
That call for patient care ;  
There is a cross in every lot,  
And an earnest need for prayer ;  
But a lowly heart that leans on Thee  
Is happy anywhere <sup>1</sup>.”

I know not what your special cross may be, the cross in front of you that casts its shadow on your onward path : it may be lighter, it may be heavier :

<sup>1</sup> Miss Waring.


it seems, however terrifying to yourself, scarce worthy to be mentioned when you think of His. But be it what it may, heavy or light, your happiness, like His, will not be found in shirking it or seeking to avoid it ; but only as you manfully go forth to meet it may you hope for solid peace and satisfaction, conscious that you are following His steps who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God, to whom with the Father, and the Holy Ghost, be honour and glory now and for ever. Amen.



## II. FORESHADOWING OF HUMAN OPPOSITION.

*Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.*—  
ST. JOHN ii. 19.

*Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross.*—ST. MATT. xxvii. 40.

HUS the cleansing of the temple at the opening of His ministry prepared the way for the most bitter mockery that met our Saviour at its close, and Jesus, in the pregnant words which we have quoted, showed that He knew that it was even so. How the Lord's knowledge of His suffering came to Him is a question that we can no more fully answer than we can answer when it came. And yet we may just touch it here and there. One element of His conviction was clearly His deep insight to the heart of man. There was an element of inward intuition and of divine self-consciousness—self-consciousness a weakness in all others, a strength to Him alone ; there was an element of knowledge gained by patient study of God's holy Word, the light of prophecy that shone upon His way : there

was an element of outward observation too. And it is of this last that we would treat especially to-day.

"Now when He was in Jerusalem at the passover, on the feast-day, many believed in His name, when they saw the miracles which He did. But Jesus did not commit Himself unto them, because He knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man: for He knew what was in man<sup>1</sup>."

He saw reflected in the very faces of the men with whom He dwelt, to whom He ministered, the fate awaiting Him, and yet He never checked His works of love. It is easy to see towards the close of His ministry how fast the opposition thickened round Him, how many times His life was threatened and assailed, how undisguised and virulent the enmity of all the leaders of the people was, and how it chilled, distracted, qualified the first enthusiasm of the simple crowd. But it is worth our while to notice that from the very early days, the bright dawn of His ministry before the rulers' hatred had developed into action, our Lord had warning of the bitter end.

The principal forces that were arrayed against Him at the last were these—the envy of the Jewish rulers, the fickleness of the uncertain multitude, the contemptuous indifference of Herod, the worldly policy of Pilate. All these were gathered to a head, and organized into one great conspiracy of wickedness by Satan the arch-enemy of souls.

<sup>1</sup> St. John ii. 23-25.

Of all these several forms of opposition, with one apparent possible exception, our Lord had clearest intimations before His ministry had long begun. The possible exception is the case of Pilate. Our Lord was not, so far as we remember, brought into early contact with the Roman Government; but Pilate was the least unfriendly of all the enemies that Jesus met. Pilate to the very last had no quarrel with Jesus, and found no fault in Him; rather he had a real desire for His safety, but not an overmastering desire. And hence we see that even this exception was rather apparent than real. Whatever awe the thought of Roman justice, regarded in the abstract, might inspire, there surely was no single Jewish peasant in the time of Christ so blind as to suppose that his own private claims would be permitted to conflict with or to over-ride the personal convenience of his governor. It needed no especial cleverness or superhuman insight to perceive that a mere peasant and justice would be of little weight against a proprætor and policy.

For the rest, our Lord had met with Satan in the wilderness. He knew his malice,—He knew his subtilty, He knew his power, He knew his unquenchable hate. Our Lord had met the rulers in the temple: the zeal of His Father's house consumed Him. Regardless of all consequence, where the honour of His Father was at stake, He had, as they would say, infringed their privilege, stopped their unrighteous—or, as they themselves

would term it—their rightful and customary merchandise, and cast a slur on their authority. However much His presence, His majesty, His overpowering earnestness, and conscious rectitude might bear down opposition at the moment, He was far too clear-sighted to suppose that conduct so daring would pass unchallenged, unresented. "What sign showest thou?" in those few words—for surely the mere doing of the act was sign enough—He read the sentence of their blindness and of His own future death. And when the end did really come, it is strange to find that the two suborned false witnesses went back to this occasion for a pretext.

Our Lord soon proved the fickleness of those He came to save. Your minds will readily revert to that strange scene at Nazareth. The crowded synagogue, the eager faces of the worshippers, the rapt attention, the deep wonderment at all His gracious words; and then, but a few minutes afterwards, the same crowd on the hill-top mad with confusion and rage because their victim had escaped. If this could happen in the first year at Nazareth, where He had lived so long, it was nothing inconceivable that something similar should happen at Jerusalem at last; that once again a way of sorrows should follow quickly on a shout of welcome, and recognition of prophetic claims.

And, lastly, as for Herod Antipas, our Lord had little reason to confide in him. Had not his father sought to slay Him in His infancy? and in the

case of John the Baptist He had early proof that here it was "like father, like son." Indeed we know on the witness of His own lips that this plain warning did not pass unheeded. When He descended from the mount of glory He said to His followers, "Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things; but I say unto you, that Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of Man suffer of them. Then the disciples understood that He spake unto them of John the Baptist <sup>1</sup>." *Likewise*—the parallel is striking, for Herod observed John, and when he had heard him, he did many things and heard him gladly. And Herod was glad when he saw Jesus, and hoped to have seen some miracle done by Him, but none the less with his men of war he set Him at nought, arrayed Him in a gorgeous robe, and sent Him (O fearful levity of wickedness!) to meet His death.

Here we may pause amazed at the thought that as our Lord looked round Him, there was not one man He could trust. All would consent, and most would seek that He should die. Still as He moved about among them doing good He read His condemnation upon every face. He came to His own, His own received Him not; in the little company most close to Him there lurked (and He knew it to His sorrow!) His chiefest enemy. Such contradiction of sinners! not only at the last, all

<sup>1</sup> St. Matt. xvii. 11-13.

through His ministry He read it, He predicted it, He knew what was in man.

The more we think upon this aspect of His holy ministry the more we shall be filled with wonder and astonishment at His unfailing gentleness and hopefulness. We are so apt to mix the thought of weakness and illusion with kindness and benevolence that it is hard for us to understand a character in which the two things are entirely divorced.

The man who has a wide experience of human wickedness, a subtle knowledge of the human heart is apt to grow a little cynical. He hardens his heart, closes his purse, passes his wise remarks, and wins an easy reputation for his shrewdness, and selfishness is sometimes on its little stage exceedingly shrewd.

On the other hand, the man of overflowing kindness, who opens wide purse, heart, and hand, lays himself open in not a few plain instances to being grossly disappointed and grievously deceived. It must be so while men are what they are; and so he is thought weak, soft-hearted, and extravagant. Benevolence is looked upon as blind, and worldliness alone as open-eyed. It is not fair, and yet it is but natural, and there is much to give it countenance. In truth it is not the shrewd cynic who has the deepest knowledge of the wickedness of wicked men. There is a lack of sympathy about

him that renders it impossible. The men who have cast themselves heart and soul into the breach, the men who have risked their reputation for sagacity that so at any cost they may do something to raise the fallen and degraded, are probably really the very men who, though they do not care to talk about it much, know far the most not only of the brighter, but of the darker side of human character. The callous and cold-blooded critic can never feel the pulse of the machine, and gets his wisdom but at second-hand. At least it is a patent falsehood, a most wretched sneer, that all philanthropists are *ipso facto* fools. And yet the very best of them are oftentimes deceived, for some degree of ignorance, some merciful concealment of the wickedness of those for whom they labour seems absolutely needed to give them any heart to persevere. The truest kindliness of sinful men would stagger back appalled before the perfect revelation of the whole wickedness of those for whom they toil. The purest love of sin-stained men would fail to bear the strain. One, and one only, was complete in knowledge, and perfect in beneficence. The heart of man lay like an open book before the eyes of Jesus. No crooked winding, no tortuous excuse escaped the searching of those holy eyes; and yet there was no check to His beneficence, no clouding of His hopefulness, no bitterness, no sourness, no hardening. No wonder that men failed to understand a character in which

the purest kindliness of heart and most consummate shrewdness and discernment were wedded in indissoluble unity.

Simon the Pharisee reckoned himself a judge of character. He thought our Lord was ignorant, where He was merely kind. "This man, if He were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is: for she is a sinner<sup>1</sup>." But Jesus knew, and Jesus said of her, "Her sins which are many"—many, and all so known to Me already, I do not even ask her to confess them one by one—"are forgiven her, for she loved much." Our Saviour saw most clearly the possibilities and actual facts of evil; He saw with equal clearness the greater possibilities of good. He did not despair of a humanity seen through in all its crookedness. His ministry from first to last was one long ministry to murderers, His own discovered murderers, and yet it never lost its cheerfulness, it never lost its hope. We are so soon disheartened, we are so readily deceived. Oh! let us turn our eyes in gratitude to Jesus whose love with its unerring gift of sympathy has rightly read the plague of our own hearts. He knows our wickedness, and yet He has not turned away our prayer, nor shut His mercy from us. And if the love of Jesus has availed for us, if it is deeper than the deepest hell of our own sinful heart, why should we ever be discouraged? Why need we ever despair?

<sup>1</sup> St. Luke vii. 39.



The knowledge of our Lord without His love would simply terrify and scare us. His love without His knowledge could never be a sure foundation for our hope. We should feel at every moment that some dark hidden revelation, some sudden charge that had escaped Him hitherto might leap to light against us, and shatter the fair edifice to fragments. But when we are assured both for ourselves and others,


“The Lord who dwells on high  
Knows all, yet loves us better than He knows<sup>1</sup>,”

then we have found a solid rock to build upon,  
then we have found a hope that will not fail us in  
our time of need.

<sup>1</sup> Keble, Christian Year, 24th Sunday after Trinity.

### III. THE PATIENT TEACHING OF HIS FOLLOWERS.

*From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto His disciples, how that He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. Then Peter took Him, and began to rebuke Him, saying, Be it far from Thee, Lord : this shall not be unto Thee.—ST. MATT. xvi. 21, 22.*

E have seen how from the very opening of His ministry our Lord had clear foreknowledge of the sufferings awaiting Him ; how at the very marriage feast at Cana, where He threw Himself so unreservedly into the joyousness of the occasion, the hour of His humiliation was still before His eyes. We have viewed more closely one special source of His enlightenment, the wisdom that enabled Him without illusion or deception to read the inmost thoughts of those by whom He was surrounded : we have seen Him labouring unweariedly to save the thankless and rebellious, serving His own discovered murderers with loyal and ungrudging service, and never losing heart or

hope. To-day we will examine rather His patience and His tenderness in the instruction of the ignorant.

The foresight of the Saviour stands out in marked contrast with the denseness and the blindness of His chosen followers: and few things are more beautiful or more worthy of our careful study in His character than the tender consideration, the patient thoughtfulness, and the assiduous reiteration with which He set Himself to open out their minds to these unpalatable truths. If we needed any justification for these special Lenten services, I think that we might surely find it here. There are times when we are very apt to be discouraged at our own denseness, our own ignorance, our own deadness and want of apprehension of the highest truth. The story of our Saviour's sufferings falls on our ears so frequently without the least apparent entrance to our heart. We understand the words of it, we know the facts of it, we are not mentally deficient, nor are we actively opposed to it, we do not wish to close our ears and shut our hearts against the entrance of the truth. If there is anything to learn, we wish to learn it; if there is anything to feel, we wish to feel it; and yet our hearts remain unquickened, and our lives unchanged. How can it be? How is it that a motive force of such tremendous and acknowledged potency produces in us a result so poor and so inadequate; nay, I had almost said, so infinitesimal, so in-

discernible? Have we indeed listened so often only to be case-hardened against all impression? Should we stand a better chance if the story came to us now suddenly, and with the great shock of a first surprise? Have we disqualified ourselves by past insouciance from ever grasping the significance of this great history? I believe that many a Christian is tempted at times to despair, to turn away from the whole record with a feeling of hopelessness: "Well! if it cannot mean more to me than it appears to mean, I had surely better put it aside and thrust it from me altogether. There must be something in the very constitution of my nature, some special hardness, some want of susceptibility, some old inherent failing that, whatever this great news may be to others, makes me incapable of understanding it, and so I will turn to my needlework, my business, my gardening, some plain and simple thing within my faculties that I can really understand. The story of the cross of Jesus I will not say it is not true, or that it is not comprehensible. I know no cause to doubt of it as history, the narrative is very simple and reads so truthfully, and yet it appeals to faculties within my soul that are quite dormant if not dead. The story may be everything to others, to me it often seems, alas, a tale of little meaning; aye, though I try to teach it to others, a tale of little meaning though the words are strong. Why this insensibility, this cold insensibility to Jesus' suf-

ferings? Can I indeed be reprobate, a very traitor to the truth of God?"

If thoughts like these intrude (and so at times I know they may) to mar our simple faith in our Redeemer, and rob us of the joy of our salvation, where shall we turn for help in our perplexity? how shall we drive away the thought of gloom?

There is no surer way than to think much upon the wonderful patience of Jesus in educating His Apostles to understand His sufferings. These were the men of His own choosing—the men whom He had singled out from all the rest as the foundation-stones and pillars of His church; these were His chosen couriers to bear His name and truth to every quarter of the world; these were the men whom we now honour as the highest types of saintliness, whose lives are the purest example, save the one pattern life, and whose words are the choicest heritage of Christendom. And yet how very very slow they were to understand the story of the Saviour's sufferings, and with what infinite unwearied patience He instructed them. No portion of His ministry is more full of pathos than these reiterated lessons that were to Him so great a sacrifice, that called up before His own mind and imagination so vividly at each narration all that He knew He must endure, and yet that seemed so wholly wasted, and so entirely misunderstood. How much these constant teachings that reached the ears and left the heart apparently unaltered

must have emphasized to Jesus the sense of His own utter loneliness as the great Bearer of the sins of men. "I have trodden the wine-press alone, and of the people there was none with me," not one, even among His closest followers.

A great preacher<sup>1</sup> lately gone from us has said, that if you could imagine one of the master-minds of England—Lord Bacon, for example, or Sir Isaac Newton—set down in a Sunday school with a class of infants to instruct them in words of one syllable, you would have but a faint picture or parable of the great disproportion in knowledge and perception between the pattern teacher Jesus and the Apostles whom He taught. And yet how patiently He set about His task, line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little, and there a little, as they were able to bear it.

The verse that I have taken as our text sets before us the commencement of a distinct stage in this great process of their education. They have learned in years of closest intercourse to know Him as the Christ of God, and now in the remaining months He has the harder lesson to impart to them that Christ must suffer and be set at nought.

The mere fact that our Lord spent months of patient labour in preparing and opening the minds of the Apostles for the great climax of Calvary, would justify the Church of Jesus in her wise provision of forty days for special meditation before

<sup>1</sup> Canon Liddon.

she celebrates His death and victory : for truths of such tremendous magnitude need time for their appropriation, they claim a patient pondering.

But if the mere fact that Jesus so undertook to educate His followers is in itself instructive, the method of His teaching is certainly not less so. In later meditations we may enlarge on this or that detail, to-day we will but take a comprehensive survey of the whole process of enlightenment, and note the three great principles that underlay it all—

- (1) A wise and merciful concealment as long as it was possible.
- (2) A bold announcement as soon as it was needful.
- (3) A constant and unwearied reiteration and enforcement until the lesson had been carried home.

(1) Our Saviour knew from first to last the trouble that awaited Him, but only in the last few months before His Passion did He take His followers into His own close confidence. The secret, one would think, must often have weighed heavily upon His heart and made Him long for human sympathy. But He might not seek the sympathy without producing pain, arousing prejudice, and staggering the weak imperfect faith of those who followed Him, and so the secret was well kept: until they had been strengthened to receive it, the revelation was held back from them, and yet not wholly so. There was no deception,

no illusion ; the seeds of suspicions that might germinate into a firm conviction afterwards were once and again dropped almost unobserved into their minds and left for time and the events of Providence to give them life and fruitfulness ; but there was not a rude awakening or a blinding blow. Take, for instance, the words of Christ to Nicodemus which seem to have been uttered within the hearing of His followers : " As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up<sup>1</sup>." To us they very plainly speak of Calvary and the Atoning Sacrifice, but then we have the commentary of the actual cross ; without it we might wander in the dark and find a thousand outlets from our gloomy fears. The sentence is like the broken half of a tally, it can do little more than waken wonder until its fellow-fragment has been put to it, then all is clear. And this holds good of very much of Jesus' early teaching : " Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up ;" " when therefore He was risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this unto them, and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said<sup>2</sup>." All the first hints about His passion were parabolic and enigmatical. " When the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, then shall they fast in those days<sup>3</sup>." We, with the story of the Cross before us, can read in this a prophecy of human violence, but the

<sup>1</sup> St. John iii. 14.<sup>2</sup> St. John ii. 19, 22.<sup>3</sup> St. Mark ii. 20.



disciples before the great event were not confined to this interpretation, they may have dreamed of such a rapture as Elijah's—a freedom and immunity from death. So when our Saviour first officially gathered around Him His choice company, it would not have been fair to leave them quite unwarned, it would not have been safe to tell them plainly all. He frankly told them, “The brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and ye shall be hated of all men for My name’s sake.” He would not have them follow Him on any false pretence: He gave them as a reason, “The disciple is not above his master nor the servant above his Lord.” He even went a little further, and said, “He that taketh not up his cross and followeth after Me is not worthy of Me<sup>1</sup>.” But yet He did not tell them plainly, “I shall be crucified.” He left them to themselves to draw the inference. They might have thought Him to be speaking in dark sentences and Eastern parables.

(2) We see the kindness and consideration and careful forethought in His manner of instruction, but such reserve must have its limits. It would not do to lead them to the foot of Calvary with no more clear enlightenment. The rude arousing would be too terrible; their faith could not sustain the sudden blow.

And so months before the end the Saviour set Himself to wrestle with their ignorance. And now

<sup>1</sup> St. Matt. x. 21, 22, 24, 38.

He is as bold and as outspoken as formerly He had been cautious and discreet. The parable is dropped: the facts are put in plain simplicity. He led them aside for the purpose; He felt their spiritual pulses to know if they were strong enough to stand the daring treatment. He drew from the apostle Peter the glorious confession, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," and then He knew His time had come. And here what strikes us most is His unflinching courage. He knew the risk of revelation, and yet the risk of a concealment would be greater still. He knew the strain upon their faith and their allegiance, but He knew also that the strain would be still greater if deferred: and so He did not hesitate. Although the cross was to the Jew a stumbling-block—to the Apostles most of all; although Peter was plunged from the height of exaltation to meet his terrible rebuke, the risk must still be run, the venture made; yet even here there is a little merciful withholding of the fulness of the fatal truth. "The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be killed;" the cross was wrapped up in that, but it was not plainly revealed—only the old enigma once again put in a new connection with clearer hints for its elucidation. "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me." The whole passage seems to breathe with the intense yearning of Jesus that after all their faith might not be overthrown, and to this end especially

He speaks of His kingdom and His glory at its close <sup>1</sup>.

(3) We can see the earnestness of this instruction, this self-communication of the Son of Man. He had unlocked the secret of His heart. He had lavished the store of His great love. His whole man had gone forth to them. And they were simply dense and ignorant, and would not understand. To flesh and blood what could be more discouraging? And yet He would not fail nor be discouraged till He had brought forth judgment unto victory. From that time forward He set Himself to go patiently over and over again the same old truths: and yet they did not understand them. Quite at the last the scene at Calvary came as a sudden shock, an unexpected blow. Their faith experienced a dark eclipse, but for this patient teaching of the Saviour it would have been extinguished utterly. Then when He rose again He set to work again—the same old truths again, the same unwearied patience, the same ungrudging toil. Then opened He their understanding to understand the Scriptures, and showed them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself, how Christ must suffer and rise again the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. Yea, even when He had ascended He kept in mind the education of His followers; He did not leave them

<sup>1</sup> St. Matt. xvi. 13–28.

orphans, but sent to them His Comforter to bring to their remembrance the things which He had said.

Here we may fitly pause, and ponder on the lessons we may learn.


For ourselves—if we are tempted to despair at our own sluggishness, let us remember that others too have suffered as we suffer ; let us remember that we have a very patient teacher, and let us brace our minds to give the more earnest heed to the things that we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. To recognize the difficulties in the way of understanding is really the first step to understand.

And then for others—if we should have to teach them, as many of us have, how very patient we should be ; how slow to be discouraged if our words are not welcomed at once ; how well content to labour if only we may see the harvest in long distant years. The patience of our Saviour may come to us as a continued inspiration, and as a constant rebuke. “Let us not be weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap if we faint not <sup>1</sup>.”

<sup>1</sup> Gal. vi. 9.

#### IV. THE MOUNT OF GLORY AND THE MOUNT OF SUFFERING.

*And it came to pass about an eight days after these sayings, He took Peter and John and James, and went up into a mountain to pray. And as He prayed, the fashion of His countenance was altered, and His raiment was white and glistening. And, behold, there talked with Him two men, which were Moses and Elias: who appeared in glory, and spake of His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem.*  
—ST. LUKE ix. 28–31.

E have seen our Saviour beginning the definite instruction of His followers about His sufferings. We marked the great importance of the crisis, the danger of the revelation to their weak imperfect faith, our Lord's full consciousness of the great risk involved, His eagerness to fence them with every possible safeguard. Before He spoke to them He felt their spiritual pulses; He reassured Himself that by the thousand subtle influences of His companionship they had firm hold upon the truth that He was Christ, whilst the confession He elicited served yet the more to strengthen that firm hold. He knew that truth must come to them as light came to the blind man whose cure St. Mark describes to us as

happening just before, not all at once but in successive stages and by distinct degrees. And then He spared them yet another way, He told them plainly that He should be killed, He did not tell them openly at first He should be crucified. And, lastly, He revived their hopes by speaking of the glories that should be.

“For whosoever shall be ashamed of Me and of My words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when He shall come in His own glory, and in His Father’s, and of the holy angels. But I tell you of a truth, there be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God<sup>1</sup>.”

It is of this last point that I would speak especially to-day—the hope of glory a support in suffering.

It is very noticeable that as soon as the Lord began to teach them plainly that He should be killed, He taught with equal openness and clearness that on the third day He should rise again. It was impossible to separate the two truths one from the other, for they were twin-conceptions indissolubly linked in one. We know how strange the thought of resurrection was to the followers of Jesus—all that lay beyond the cross, that land of sunny light and of unclouded brightness to the Saviour, to them was wrapped in thick obscurity, vague, dim, and shadowy. No wonder then they could not understand His sufferings; it would have

<sup>1</sup> St. Luke ix. 26, 27.

been surprising if they could. And yet it was most needful that they should, as far as possible, be warned and sheltered from the great shock of surprise. And so the Saviour laboured to enlighten them not only on the subject of the suffering, but also about the glory that should follow it. This was at least one purpose, perhaps the leading purpose, of His most glorious Transfiguration. It followed very closely the first announcement of His suffering, it was intended in some degree to break and moderate the force of that great blow.

The Transfiguration may be regarded as in some respects the very climax of our Saviour's ministry: it represents to us what would have been the fitting close and termination of His life, regarded in itself and quite apart from our Redemption, for in itself His life of spotless holiness deserved the crown without the cross, the glory without the suffering. Here was the Father's testimony to His blamelessness, here was the foretaste of His future heaven. And to the Apostles how glorious it seemed! "Lord, it is good for us to be here," exclaimed St. Peter, "and *I* will make" (so the best readings have it) "three tabernacles, one for Thee, one for Moses, and one for Elias." Such were the crude ideas of the Apostles; but other thoughts were in the heart of Jesus, and other thoughts were in the minds of Moses and Elias. They appeared with Him in glory: but, oh! how strange that the shadow of the cross should fall so dark across this brightest

passage of His ministry—"they spoke of His decease or exodus that he should *fulfil*" (fulfil since prophecy announced it) "in Jerusalem."

It must have been of great importance to these leading Apostles at the outset of their special course of instruction to be so thrown back on the ancient Scriptures.

We see in St. Peter's second letter how it had been a stay to him in days of gloom. In the same passage in which he is recalling this vision on the mountain, he says: "We have also a more sure word of prophecy to which we do well to give heed as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in our hearts<sup>1</sup>." The whole course of Christ's special instruction was to point out to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself—it was well then that they should have so glorious an introduction to the course, both law and prophecy made luminous in presence of the Lord. They might never have endured the sight of Jesus in Gethsemane, had they not first been strengthened by the sight of Jesus on the holy mount. True, on both occasions they were all overwhelmed with sleep—they got a glimpse and not a steady view both of the glory and the suffering, and yet the glimpse was infinitely precious.

The glory of Jesus, as it has often been noticed, was not a glory with which He was clothed and outwardly invested, a thing conferred upon Him

<sup>1</sup> 2 Pet. i. 19.



from without, rather it was the full and natural expression of His own inward character—the outcome of His own inherent loveliness, the plainest commentary on His own grand words, “No man hath ascended into heaven but He Who came down from heaven, even the Son of Man Who is in heaven<sup>1</sup>.” There was nothing strange or abnormal to Jesus in the outshining of His holiness, the miracle was rather this, that at all other times that visible outshining was so carefully repressed. It was because He was at all times so fully possessed of His own blessedness, whether it shone in outward show or not, that at all times He was so grandly able to endure, “who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God<sup>2</sup>.” Of that joy no sufferings, however terrible, could ever rob Him, that joy of perfect unity with God, entire consecration to His holy will.

“No eye but His might ever bear  
To gaze all down that drear abyss,  
Because none ever saw so clear  
The shore beyond of endless bliss :  
The giddy waves so restless hurl’d,  
The vex’d pulse of this feverish world,  
He views and counts with steady sight,  
Used to behold the Infinite.

But that in such communion high  
He hath a fount of strength within,  
Sure His weak heart would break and die,  
O’erburthen’d by His brethren’s sin ;

<sup>1</sup> St. John iii. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Heb. xii. 2.

Weak eyes on darkness dare not gaze,  
It dazzles like the noon-day blaze;  
But He who sees God's face may brook  
On the true face of Sin to look<sup>1</sup>."

If, then, the perfect knowledge of His future glory was needful to secure the Saviour's perfect patience in His sufferings, it was needful that His disciples too should have some glimpse and glimmering beforehand, unless the shock of Calvary should utterly upset their faith. The very secrecy so solemnly enjoined upon them at the time, would help them to treasure this one scene yet the more deeply in their memories.

And now what is the lesson for ourselves? I think a protest against a certain artificial teaching that serves to bring Church seasons into disrepute. Lent is indeed a time for conflict and for penitence, but Lent is specially appointed to prepare for Easter-tide. The two things are inseparably bound together, they cannot, without loss and injury, be torn apart. The joy of Easter is an overflowing happiness, it is reflected back on all the sombre forty days that usher in the festival. You may not say, For forty days we will exclude the thought of all but Jesus' sufferings and our own sins, we will enforce upon ourselves a morbid melancholy state of mind, we will at least try our best to shut out resurrection glory, we will school and discipline our souls to be as miserable as we can, and then

<sup>1</sup> Keble, Christian Year, 12th Sunday after Trinity.

at Easter-tide we will awake to sudden blessedness—a violent revulsion to end a lengthened strain.


We may not thus break off our creed half-way at “He descended into hell.” The mere attempt to force our thoughts into unnatural and uncongenial man-made moulds is sure to bring its own revenge with it—we cannot but rebel against the false restraint. The mountain of Transfiguration breaks in with strange abruptness upon the solemn discipline that led to Calvary; and let us remember that only in the light and glory and beauty of that mountain can we, too, think of Calvary aright. We cannot gaze on the unmitigated darkness.

There is an exceeding bitter cry from the darkness, the cry of the sin-bearer, “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?” We could not bear it unless we had the words of the Father on the mountain already ringing in our ears to reassure us, “This is My beloved Son, hear ye Him.” The cross so horrible in unadorned repulsiveness, needed the holy conclave on the mountain-top even beforehand to invest it with its royal dignity; and we learn, too, that the same cross, our only refuge in this life, shall be the highest object of our thought, the central bond of intercourse in that fair realm of blessedness beyond the grave.

## V. THE FACE SET ZIONWARDS.

*And straightway all the people, when they beheld Him, were greatly amazed, and running to Him saluted Him.—*  
ST. MARK ix. 15.

*And they were in the way going up to Jerusalem; and Jesus went before them: and they were amazed; and as they followed, they were afraid. And He took again the twelve, and began to tell them what things should happen unto Him.—*ST. MARK x. 32.

E have spoken of the Transfiguration, the shadow of the cross that fell athwart the brightest glory, the glory that could clothe with an undreamt-of dignity the very cross of shame—we looked upon that scene upon the mountain as the natural outcome, the proper consummation, of Christ's own life of sinless obedience viewed in itself and quite apart from the redemption of His fellow-men. Yet for the joy of saving us He laid aside the glory, He embraced the cross: and so we are brought back to earth again, brought back to face that Cross of Calvary which was the actual consummation of His life of love. From the Transfiguration onwards the thought of it was ever in His mind, the shadow settled down upon Him not to be removed until

the cry of triumph, "It is finished"—broke from His parched lips. And yet the cloud that overshadowed Him was bright with the strange glory of His great self-sacrifice.

The allusions to our Saviour's sufferings from this time forward are so frequent, nay almost so continuous, that we are forced to select and cannot even enumerate the indications in detail. Let us take then, as the special subject of our meditation, the eagerness, I had almost said the impatience of Jesus to meet His suffering and the great majesty of self-devotion that shone forth in His very countenance, compelling awe.

It may be wrong to use the word impatience as applied to Christ, that pattern of all patient suffering, and yet if we can rob it of any remnant of human infirmity that in our minds still clings to it—if we can but divest it of all thought of fretfulness, complaining, or present duty carelessly performed—the word will hardly seem too strong to us.

Our Lord was perfect man. We know the terrors of anticipation are often worse and harder to endure than actual suffering: and when we know a pain is unavoidable we long to realize and face the worst. We long to shorten, if it may be, the trying interval of our suspense. To the soldier the night before the battle is often more trying to the spirit than the battle-day. And this pure human instinct, this desire to be up and doing, this wish to face the suffering—if it must be—in fact and not

in thought alone was present to our Lord in all its full intensity. It shows itself in action and in word.

In word—"O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you?"—"I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" "That thou doest, do quickly" (or "more quickly" as it might be rendered). And not only in word, in action too He *went before*, ascending to Jerusalem. He did not wait to be discovered, but He *went forth* to meet the traitor and to yield Himself to death<sup>1</sup>.

There was impatience, in that He was sensible that He was greatly straitened, until His baptism of blood had been accomplished—till then His glory must be still foregone, till then His steps must ever seek, His thoughts must ever centre on, His cramping cross of misery. But there was no impatience in that the knowledge of the death awaiting Him wrung from His lips no cry of murmuring. He did indeed admit His human feeling of reluctance. His was no stoical indifference to grief or pain: but never once did He complain against His God—or set His will against the Father's will. And there was no impatience, because, though He complained of man's perversity, His hand was never shortened that it could not save: it was stretched out to raise the fallen lunatic; indeed no miracle displays more patient heedfulness

<sup>1</sup> St. Mark ix. 19; St. Luke xii. 50; St. John xiii. 27; St. Mark x. 32; St. John xviii. 4.

in every small detail, than that described to us with such minuteness by St. Mark, as having taken place immediately beneath the Mount of Glory, just when the pressure of His own approaching death and man's ingratitude was resting the most heavily upon His soul. And there was no impatience, because, though He was pressing onward to Jerusalem, His ear was not heavy that it could not hear, the cry of the poor blind man came to Him. He stopped upon His journeying and gave him back his sight. There was an eager pressing on to victory, but a repose amid His earnestness, an undisturbed performance of every little duty by the way.

The late Bishop Fraser has drawn a striking picture of a visit of his to a scene of mining disaster in his diocese of Manchester. I do not recollect his actual words, but they were very much to this effect. What made the most impression on him was the faces of the men prepared to go down into the darkness at peril of their lives to rescue life. "I do not know," he says, "what an angel looks like, for I have never seen one, but there was truly something heavenly about the faces of those mining men."

You can picture them—can you not?—taking their lives in their hands, calm with the calmness of a great resolve and an unshaken purpose, but eager with suppressed excitement, and longing—who shall say how keenly?—for the signal that

shall end their hour of waiting and send them down into the darkness to wrest his prey from death.

Well, that is but a feeble human parable of Jesus' greater work. The darkness into which He was preparing to descend was not the darkness of a flooded coal mine, but the far deeper darkness of the grave itself, the gathered blackness of the powers of hell. The life that He was venturing was not a life dear only to a little band of friends and relatives, and known to few beyond, it was a life of infinite value, a life on which depended the life of all besides. He was the very fountain-head and Prince of life who was exposed to such an awful hazard. And yet again, the lives that He was rescuing were not ten, twenty, fifty to be saved for time, but the lives of the unnumbered myriads of the whole race of man for generation after generation to be redeemed for all eternity. The heroes of the coal-mine were descending to their rescue work, amid the sympathies, the prayers, the blessings of assembled thousands, urged by entreaties of wife, and child, and friend of those below. Our Saviour was about to face His darkness amid the mocking of the multitude, without a voice, save for the one repentant thief, without a single voice to cheer Him and encourage Him. Again, the miners were descending at a grave risk of life, prepared to die for others if it must be so, but each man hoping that he would not die, but



come back safe again amid the blessings of the multitude, a duty done, a danger braved, and, it may be, a comrade rescued from destruction. We would not in the least diminish or detract from the stern heroism of the rescue gang. Our eyes strain after them as they descend into the gloom. We follow them in thought along the narrow passages, half stifled for the want of ventilation, perhaps in total darkness, at times half buried in the falling débris, at times half choked with deadly fire-damp, and ever pressing onwards so long as the bare chance remains to them that they may rescue one of the entombed, and never pausing to enquire whether that one were friend or foe to them. We feel it is not every one would dare like that.

And yet their heroism after all is but the faint reflection of a greater, of the heroism of One of whom we are at times assured, that it was in the more tender and feminine virtues that He alone excelled.

Well, we may go a step further: if the great self-devotion of the miners impressed itself upon their very countenance, so that the Bishop who beheld them declared that they appeared to him quite heavenly in rugged beauty and determination, how was it with the countenance of Him, the greater rescuer, the Christ of God? Did not the beauty of His soul impress itself upon His very features? Did not the heaven of love that was

within Him, the heroism of self-sacrifice, the eagerness for action, the calmness in suspense imprint their characters upon His face? The verses that I have chosen for our thought to-day assure us that they did.

Why was it that, when our Lord descended from the mount of the Transfiguration, the people were amazed, and running to Him, saluted Him? Was it that the rays of brightness still lingered about Him although the vision had gone by? or was it not rather the joy of His self-sacrifice, the joy of glory set aside and toil and danger welcomed that so illumined Him? We know that on the mountain He talked with Moses and Elias of His death—we know that, while descending with His followers, He spoke to them about the same great theme, and when He met that poor distracted multitude, so thrown into confusion by the devil's power, the light of His unshaken purpose of conquering that devil through death itself was kindling in His eyes, the glory of self-sacrifice was drawing all men unto Him.

A merely outward radiance would not have so prevailed with them. Long years before the face of Moses shone when he descended from the mountain. The people did not draw to him, they rather fled from him, feared him, and shunned him. He had to put a veil upon his face. And so we deem it was no outward brightness, but the magnetic power of prevailing love and the felt presence of a

purpose of deliverance that drew the people to the feet of Christ.

This same great majesty compelling awe is most apparent in the picture of His progress Zionwards—"He went before ascending to Jerusalem, and they were amazed, and as they followed they were afraid." We seem to see the conflict in His countenance, the blameless reluctance to suffer, the dauntless resolution to prevail, the face set like a flint towards Jerusalem, the eager pressing onward, and high thoughts past imagining that traced their mystic characters upon His outward features and left the smaller minds of those that followed Him bewildered and amazed.

It is impossible to put in words all that a verse like this may readily suggest to us. All account of our Lord's personal appearance has been most wisely held back from our knowledge: His stature, His complexion, the form of His features, the colour of His hair or eyes, all that might rouse a carnal curiosity is carefully withheld from view.

But the inspired Evangelists, while caring not to speak at length of that which was but passing—the outward form with which He was invested while on earth, and which was glorified and so transfigured when He rose again—have done us truer service in giving us the very image of His sinless soul, showing the influence His presence exercised, His look of grief, or wrath, or tenderness, the dignity

that clothed Him, the awe that repelled, the glory that attracted His astonished followers.

And all their pictures of His character are thoroughly consistent. St. John's account of the arrest of Jesus in Gethsemane, His captors falling on their faces to the earth, is wholly of a piece with St. Mark's story of His bewildered followers, amazed and afraid at His undaunted resolution, the mingled pain and glory of His countenance.

Amazed! Afraid! yet following afar, drawn by the irresistible attraction of His perfect love! Should not this be our feeling also as we approach the story of our Master's suffering? Impressed by His exceeding nearness, for "as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is His mercy also toward them that fear Him<sup>1</sup>," His mercy bringing Him so infinitely near, impressed yet more by His remoteness from us, His elevation over us, for "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the Lord: for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts<sup>2</sup>." Oh! as we think upon it all, that face set Zionwards, those thoughts beyond our fathoming: well may we "stand in awe, and sin not, and commune with our own heart, and in our chamber, and be still<sup>3</sup>."

<sup>1</sup> Psalm ciii. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Isaiah lv. 8, 9.

<sup>3</sup> Psalm iv. 4.

## VI. THE HOME AT BETHANY.

*Jesus therefore again groaning in Himself cometh to the grave. It was a cave, and a stone lay upon it.—ST. JOHN xi. 38.*

*She hath done what she could : she is come aforehand to anoint My body to the burying.—ST. MARK xiv. 8.*



WE began these meditations with thinking of the village shop at Nazareth, and of the quiet home at Cana, where the shadow of the Saviour's suffering fell dark across the wedding festival : and we will end as we began. Once more our thoughts are carried to a village home, a sweet oasis in the wilderness, a quiet and refreshing background to all those darker scenes of strife and violence that hedged about His later ministry. Nestling amid its fruitful orchards, just out of sight of the great city of Jerusalem, a picture of seclusion and of peace, Bethany, the house of dates, seemed little likely to play a leading part in the world's history. And yet it is hardly too much to aver that there the destinies of all mankind were settled : from thence the Saviour went forth to His suffering,

and thence, with hands upraised in benediction, He went forth to the glory of His Father's home.

Our Lord, by His Apostle, has bidden us "Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep<sup>1</sup>." He sets us an example in either thing: at the commencement and at the close of His ministry two village homes, at Cana and at Bethany, were graced by a great miracle. At Cana Jesus manifested forth His glory: at Bethany He showed to Martha and the bystanders the glory of His God: at Cana water was made wine, at Bethany the dead man was summoned from his sepulchre: in the one the Lord appeared as fellow-helper with all human joy, and in the other as the Comforter in the severest human sorrow.

We are familiar with this aspect of the home at Bethany: we turn to it for seasonable comfort for every heart that mourns. "I am the Resurrection and the Life," saith the Lord: "he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die<sup>2</sup>." How many hearts those words of His have soothed and strengthened in their sorest pain. We love to think upon the tears of Jesus over the tomb of Lazarus as a dear token of His sympathy with all that mourn; but perhaps we are too ready to forget that there was weighing on His soul a sorrow that no thought of ours can fathom, a

<sup>1</sup> Rom. xii. 15.

<sup>2</sup> St. John xi. 25, 26.

sorrow of His own. We love to think of Bethany as the blest home of family affections, the sweet abode of human sympathies, where Martha served, and Mary sat at Jesus' feet and listened to His words; and all the toil and tumult and turmoil of this naughty world seemed for a little space of time kept at arm's length from Him. We doubt not that the peace of that affection, the shelter of that kindly hospitality, the eager listening of those patient ears, the willing service of those ready hands, were all of them unspeakably refreshing to our Lord, Who knew but little of refreshment or retirement in His great life of ministry. All the more startling to us is it to observe, that on this peaceful home at Bethany the shadow of His cross of suffering, that shadow that still followed Him throughout His days, fell it may be more darkly and more notably than ever elsewhere it had crossed His path. Have you ever carefully considered those tears of Jesus at the tomb of Lazarus? And have you asked yourself the poet's question—

“What saw He mournful in that grave,  
Knowing Himself so strong to save<sup>1</sup>?”

List reverently! The life stands face to face with death! The resurrection stands before the grave! We wait the word of victory, we hear the sob of woe.

A little while before (when in Peræa) He had

<sup>1</sup> Keble, *Christian Year*, 12th Sunday after Trinity.

said to His disciples, "I am glad for your sakes that I was not there." Now, when Mary fell at His feet and said, "Lord, if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died," He groaned in the spirit and was troubled. A little while before He had said, "Lazarus sleepeth, but I go that I may wake him out of sleep." Now, when He enquires of the Jews, "Where have ye laid him?" and they answer Him, "Lord, come and see," we read that "Jesus wept." A little while before He spoke with happy calmness of "our friend Lazarus;" now, when the Jews are saying, "How true a friend He was to him," our Saviour "groaned again." And since He came with the express intent of raising him, how was it that the half-wondering, and half-reproachful word, "Could not this man, which opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died?" how could that utterance have pained the Saviour so? We cannot understand our Saviour's grief, we shrink instinctively from prying into any great sorrow, how much more into His! But yet the words remain for our instruction. He calls us to this sacred confidence of sympathy with Him: we may not spurn His gracious invitation, we seek to learn such lessons as we may.

It is a very cruel thing for any tender-hearted judge to stand and see his own just sentence put into effect, to see the lash descend upon the culprit's back, to see the bolt withdrawn, the



murderer hurried forth to meet his God; but if the culprit were his own loved friend the misery would be unspeakably increased.

Was it not He, Who four thousand years before in the cool of the day in Paradise, had given sentence upon Adam, "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return<sup>1</sup>?" and now, but a little while after, according to the reckoning of eternity, He stands a man amid other men, chief mourner amid many, beside the single grave of one who was His friend, and "Jesus weeps." The Judge Himself is the chief mourner there; "Jesus therefore, again groaning in Himself, cometh to the grave: it was a cave, and a stone lay upon it."

It is beside our present purpose to contrast Jesus with the other mourners, to show His wondrous tenderness as the consoler of the grief of others, His delicate discernment of the sisters' characters and needs: to-day we will not ponder upon the grief of others, but upon His own. We see Him there, the Life before the tomb, the only one who read the mystery and pierced the darkness of that rocky cave. He stands in calmest confidence, yet struggling with a deep emotion, keeping a strong control over Himself, and tears are on His cheeks. We have already heard His sigh of grief, we still await His words of victory.

"Take ye away the stone!" "Father, I thank

<sup>1</sup> Gen. iii. 19.

Thee that Thou hast heard Me!" "Lazarus, come forth!" "Loose him, and let him go!"

If we would rightly understand His grief, we must look onwards to another grave which was a cave, and a stone lay upon it.

Jesus alone had pierced the darkness which lay like a dead weight upon the loving sisters. His voice alone could wake the pulse of life in him who lay within, quiet and undisturbed; He only dared to let in light upon the foul corruption of the grave. Inasmuch as He was Son of God, the darkness hid not from Him, the night was as clear as the day; but inasmuch as He was Son of Man, the darkness weighed upon His spirit as heavily, nay much more heavily, than on our own. For why? He understood it better than we do. Gazing into and fathoming the darkness, He knew that only by Himself descending into it could He rescue His prey from Satan and pluck his sting from death. Death, that terror of the ages, in all its horror, silence, dreariness, is open to His view, an enemy, the last to be overcome; and He is there burdened with human flesh, burdened with human infirmities and almost over-burdened with His brethren's sin. When He said, "Take ye away the stone," He was practically rolling the great stone to the door of His own tomb. When He said, "Lazarus, come forth," He was, as it were, signing the warrant for His own sepulture. When He said, "Loose him and let him go," He was, as it were, giving the

order to the Councillor to purchase His own winding-sheet. The act by which He saved another sealed His doom. The priestly conclave met and settled their remorseless verdict, "It is expedient that one man die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not<sup>1</sup>." Thus was the raising of the dead man the signing of our Saviour's death-warrant. He died not merely for the sins of the whole world, for your sins and for mine, He died for His own friend, as truly as ever one man in a battle has perished for the saving of another.

And what was His sole confidence? "Father, I knew that Thou hearest Me always." For as He stood before that cave amid the fruit-trees—that type of His own sepulchre in garden ground—His thoughts were just the same as on the last sad day, when He was not merely confronting darkness, but utterly enveloped in its folds. For now "He groaned within Himself," yet said, "Father, I knew Thou hearest Me always;" and then He cried, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me<sup>2</sup>?" and yet exclaimed directly afterwards, "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit<sup>3</sup>." Beside the grave of Lazarus that commendation was, in fact, begun.

But now we must haste onward to the touching sequel, the closing act of this domestic drama. The garden, the cave, the stone, the winding-sheet, all had been shadowed forth to Him before that

<sup>1</sup> St. John xi. 50.    <sup>2</sup> St. Matt. xxvii. 46.    <sup>3</sup> St. Luke xxiii. 46.

tomb of Lazarus, one thing alone remained for the completeness of the prophecy—the precious ointment and the costly nard, and that the loving thought of Mary soon supplied. You know the scene, the supper in the house of Simon the leper (most likely raised from out his living death by Jesus), Lazarus there, Martha we may suppose, as usual, serving, and suddenly the house filled with a fragrance that has filled the world.

Then came the fierce remonstrance of the traitor : and Jesus instantly replied with His protecting word, “Let her alone, ... she hath done what she could : she is come aforehand to anoint My body to the burying. Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached throughout the whole world, there also shall this that she hath done be told for a memorial of her<sup>1</sup>.”

Fair as that little paradise of Bethany might seem to outward view, our Saviour well discerned in Judas' words and countenance the serpent's trail. We hardly know what most to wonder at, the unselfishness which enabled Him at such a time to take part cheerfully at all in such a feast, the noble generosity with which He shielded Mary, the marvellous forbearance with which He left the traitor unexposed, or the sublime assurance that an incident so simple in that retired hamlet should one day be the subject of the whole world's talk. What kingliness of dignity, the costly ointment

<sup>1</sup> St. Mark xiv. 6-9.

preluding the royal ride, the King anointed for His crowning, and yet at the same time the corpse anointed beforehand for its burying! The Lord accepts the homage, owns Himself the Christ, and then, in majesty, He rides to die.

How far did Mary understand her act? Had she not in her mind a plain presentiment? She knew the feeling roused among the Jews by the raising of Lazarus, and she had, doubtless, deeply pondered the trouble of the soul of Jesus before her brother's sepulchre. She must have heard Him drop mysterious hints at least of His own suffering. Perhaps, by her quick power of woman's sympathy, she had divined more clearly than any other, even than John the loved disciple, the nature of the trial that awaited Him. His last visit had ended in a hasty withdrawal to avoid capture by the Jews. She knew that now His face was set towards Jerusalem. She knew the temper of the city. She must have feared the worst. The danger was most imminent. The fear that Jesus might be hurried off to death without her having any opportunity of doing these last offices of love may well have prompted her unusual act. She little dreamed that by this very deed of hers she hastened on His fate, prepared His body for the burying in ways she little understood by fixing in the traitor's heart the fiendish resolution of bargaining away his Lord.

To save the brother from the grave Jesus forebore

not to arouse the deadly spite of Caiaphas : to save the sister from unrighteous blame, He shrank not from encountering the deadly treachery of Judas. The two great acts of love awakened two great purposes of hate. Half-way through that same week of Simon's supper the priests and Judas met, and ere its close our Lord was buried in His grave.

The love for Lazarus is wonderful ; the love for Mary is more wondrous still. Many a man, even among the unenlightened heathen, has died to save a fellow-man from death. Such heroism is not altogether rare. But Christ did more than this, He shielded Mary at His own expense. The charge against her was only some slight want of judgment in her charity. He would not let it stand unanswered for a moment, although His very life was risked in His reply. Here is the climax of true Christian chivalry, the measure of the tenderness of His most faithful love. As truly as He died for all men, so truly did He die to save a friend out of his grave, and vindicate a woman's act of trust.

Christ died, indeed, because His hour had come. Christ died because, in the far councils of eternity, He was the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world. Christ died for the sins of Lazarus and for the sins of Mary, not merely to secure the resurrection of the one, or the vindication of the other from a groundless charge. All this we fully recognise, and yet the less is not destroyed or lost or merged in

the greater ; rather the lesser truth may be a help and aid to us to understand the greater one. Perhaps it was in part for this that Jesus so indissolubly joined the gospel of His Kingdom (the message of His love in all its width and fulness) with this one individual act of special tenderness.

We often think of Christ dying for us, dying for the sins of all men, dying for His enemies and those who nailed Him to His bitter cross: and sometimes the very greatness of this sacrifice, the very width of His far-reaching love, appears to rob it of some of the strong power of personal appeal to us.

In the contemplation of a great theological doctrine we lose sight of the personal and human element of individual gentleness. It is astonishing how often we are little moved by hearing that Jesus died for all of us : it may revive our failing loyalty and quicken our dulled sense of human obligation to see that Jesus died for individual friends. And if it was so then—and Jesus is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever—may it not be so even now ? If then He truly died for Lazarus and Mary, may we not trust that He has truly died for you and me ? that our case also had its special weight with Him, that He has loved us with a special love ? This is the thought that is expressed with so much grace and tenderness in Keble's words—

“There are who sigh that no fond heart is theirs,  
None loves them best—O vain and selfish sigh !  
Out of the bosom of His love He spares—  
The Father spares the Son, for thee to die :  
For thee He died—for thee He lives again :  
O'er thee He watches in His boundless reign.

Thou art as much His care, as if beside  
Nor man nor angel liv'd in Heav'n or earth :  
Thus sunbeams pour alike their glorious tide  
To light up worlds, or wake an insect's mirth :  
They shine and shine with unexhausted store—  
Thou art thy Saviour's darling—seek no more<sup>1</sup>.”

And now to sum up all. We have seen our Saviour from the beginning knowing all : we have seen Him in forbearing love do service to His own discovered murderers : we have seen Him with unwearied patience instructing His own blinded followers : we have seen Him for our soul's salvation foregoing all that glory that was His by right, assuming a more winning glory, the glory of self-sacrifice ; and, lastly, we have seen Him face His cruel death not only for the whole wide world's salvation, but in His tender loyalty to human friends. O may we ponder on the lessons we have learned, O may He dwell within our hearts by faith, that we, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the length and breadth and depth and height, and to know the love of Christ that passeth knowledge, that we may be filled with all the fulness of God.

<sup>1</sup> Christian Year, Monday before Easter.





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