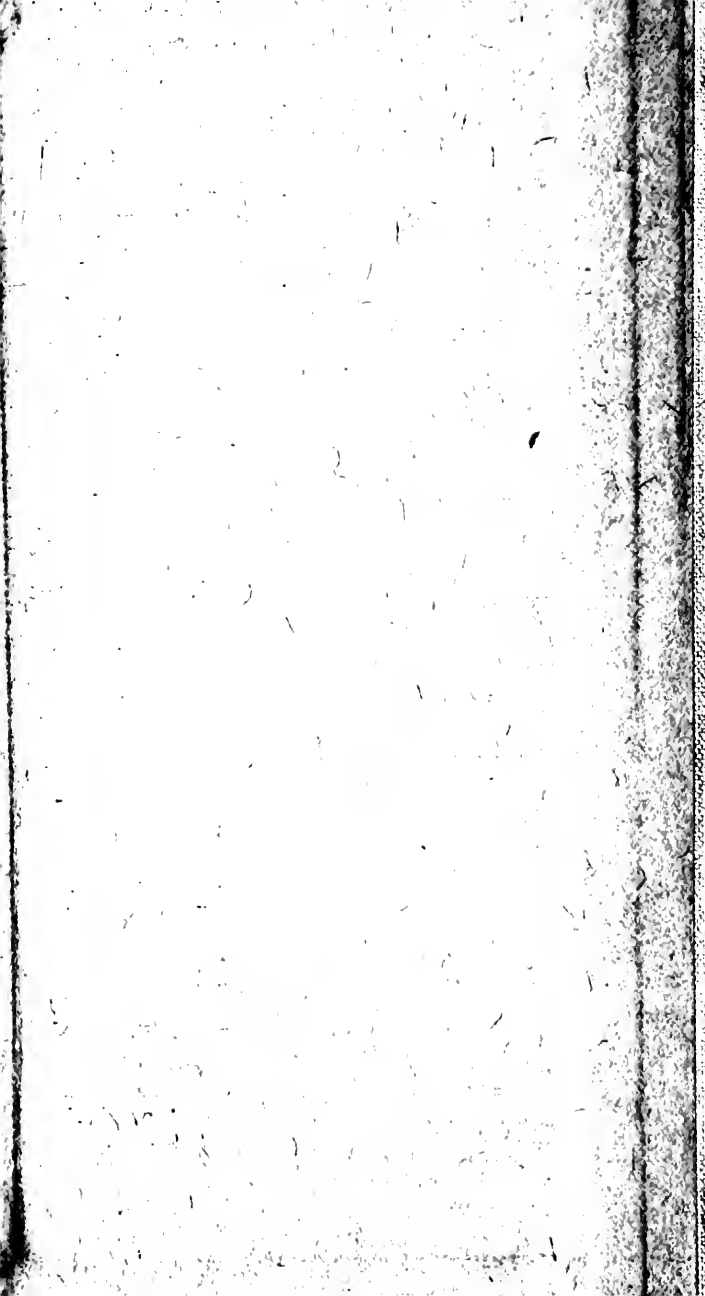


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Gethsemane and Calvary;

OR

A HARMONY

OF THE

LAST HOURS OF THE SAVIOUR

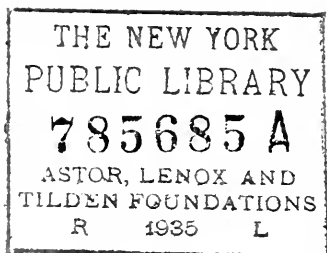
IN THE FLESH.

~~~~~  
BY THE  
REV. MORTIMER BLAKE, A.M.  
~~~~~

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Preface.

THE following pages were originally prepared in the form of sermons. The interest manifested in them by the congregation to whom they were delivered, led to the purpose of publishing them. Their present narrative form has been adopted, because it is required by the object to be secured; namely, to make a connected and complete impression of the closing scenes of the life of the Son of Man, upon the imagination and upon the heart.

As to the reason why I have thus ventured before the public, I have only to plead a desire that the youth of my own congregation, and, I will add, youth generally, if it is not arrogant, may be won away from the reading of imaginary characters, to the study of the history of the only perfect

Personage that has ever trod the surface of this guilty world, as it is written in the most attractive of books, — the Bible. In this contemplation, not only will the intellect be profited, but “the heart made better.”

The work does not pretend to originality of views, or profundity of research, but to a simple scripture harmony of that portion of the Saviour’s history which it embraces, illustrated by the ascertained customs of his times. I have felt at liberty to introduce such practical truths and reflections as are suggested by the affecting scenes through which the narrative leads us. A limited range of the means of investigation, and inexperience, must apologize for the felt imperfections of the work.

As it is, it is presented to the reader, not to gratify an unsanctified curiosity, but to draw out penitent emotions from the heart; not to afford a subject for the critic or unbeliever, but to trace a path in which the affections may travel upwards towards “Him that liveth and was dead and is alive forevermore;” who though “in the form of a servant, thought it no robbery to be equal with

God." And should this volume have the effect, through the Divine blessing, of inducing deeper love and devotion to a crucified Redeemer, deeper abhorrence to sin which erected his cross, the writer's highest wish will be answered, and to Him be all the glory.

Introduction.



“God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world,” exclaims the Apostle Paul, as he closes up his epistle to the Galatians. The words awaken a response in every pious heart. Though the saint may have, like Paul, prided himself upon his birth, his self-righteousness, or his zeal against Jesus of Nazareth, yet now he counts all these things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, his Lord ; and to gain a still deeper acquaintance with Jesus Christ, and him crucified, is the summit of his desires, and the goal of his efforts. In this acquisition he glories.

The world has her spots of renown, her battle-fields, her moss-covered monuments,

her crumbling piles; and in them the world may glory. But, while the Christian is not indifferent to these points of historic interest, at the events of the crucifixion his soul actually kindles. Here the world becomes crucified unto him, and he unto the world.

In the affecting scenes of *Gethsemane* and *Calvary* he beholds the origin and certainty of his hopes of forgiveness; and the longer he lingers among them, the more their soothing influence is felt, allaying his worldly spirit, drawing the sighs of penitence from his heart, and binding his love around Him who here became obedient unto death. And the more clear and vivid ideas he obtains of the last scenes through which the Saviour passed, in working out our redemption, the more truly and deeply does he realize the love of Christ in stooping to such humiliation, and his own guilt that made such humiliation necessary; that God might be just and justify the believer in Jesus.

Every attentive reader of the Scriptures must have been struck with the graphic power and individual distinctness with which every circumstance of our Saviour's death is

portrayed by the spirit of inspiration. While the ministry of Christ is detailed only with that particularity which a clear idea of his teachings and miracles renders necessary, each evangelist watches, and notes down, with the exactness of a reporter, every incident and every word which occurs in the last twenty-four hours of our Lord's abode in the flesh. We are taken to the sacramental table; we hear the Saviour's farewell conversation; we study the features of his sorrowful group of disciples; we are led with him over the brook Cedron to the garden of Gethsemane, and admitted with the chosen three to the privacy of his closet there; we stand by and see the arrest; we follow to the midnight and morning trial, the condemnation, and mock homage; and the closing scene is given with a minuteness and touching simplicity, which the most hardened cannot read without emotion.

Now, why is this? That the legitimate impressions of these events, the most affecting which ever occurred in this world, if not in the universe, may be made upon our

hearts. Let this be kept in mind by the reader throughout the following pages.

And as we attempt to follow the footsteps of the God Man, Christ Jesus, from Gethsemane to Calvary, may both writer and reader, subdued by the contemplation of these deeply affecting and instructive events, and thus crucified unto the world, be prepared eventually to stand with the Lamb that was slain, upon mount Zion, having washed their robes and made them white in his blood.

Gethsemane and Calvary.



CHAPTER I.

The Agony in Gethsemane.

SCRIPTURE NARRATIVE. Matt. xxvi. 30-46. — Mark xiv. 26-42. — Luke xxii. 39-46. — John xviii. 1, 2. — Hebrews v. 7.

THE greatest of the Jewish festivals, the Passover, had again arrived, when all the males of the nation were required by the Mosaic law to assemble at Jerusalem. This festival had been observed for more than fifteen hundred years annually, upon the fifteenth day of Nisan, corresponding to the fifteenth day after the first new moon in April of our present time. But at no time had it been accompanied with such interesting events as on this year: though to the great

mass of the people, its beginning was like the former days when they had convened in the holy city.

The tribes had met as usual. The families had sacrificed at the temple their passover lamb or kid. They had gathered by tens and twenties, in their houses and guest-chambers, and had partaken of the paschal supper, the sauce of bitter herbs, and the cup of blessing, and now they were discoursing upon the different topics of interest, or had retired to rest.

The Saviour also had gathered his little band of disciples, and, in a retired upper room, appropriate^{ed} to such purposes when so many strangers were in the city, had partaken of the Passover for the last time, and at its close had instituted the sacrament of the Lord's Supper in its stead.

There, in an obscure room, was the great Lawgiver, unknown to the assembled nation, abrogating their typical feast, observed for centuries, and instituted by Jehovah amid the wonders of Egypt, and substituting the simple communion, to be observed by all visible churches till the Lord come. Who

but "God manifest in the flesh" can he be who alters the commandments of Heaven, and authorizes others by his word? There, in that small guest-chamber, does the *Law-giver* reveal himself as truly as among the more striking scenes of mount Sinai. But to return.

Jesus and his disciples had partaken of the last Passover. He had communicated to them, more fully than he had ever before done, the spiritual nature of the gospel. He had committed them to the covenant protection of the Father, in a most tender intercession; and their voices had, for the last time, mingled in one of the songs of Zion.

The little assembly now breaks up, and Jesus, followed by his disciples, takes his way to his usual retreat. As they come out into the street, the chill air of the evening strikes upon them. It must be nearly midnight. For they had spent a long time in conversation. The full moon is directly over their heads, (for the Passover always happened when the moon was at the full,) and feebly illuminates the buildings and the surrounding scenery with her light.

The streets, which a few hours ago were thronged with passengers, are now deserted and still; except as the hurried step of some belated traveller reëchoes upon the pavement a moment, and then dies away. Without the walls nature is so hushed, that the lulling murmurs of the Cedron can be distinctly heard on its pebbly bed in the valley.

Jesus leads the way along from street to street. They pass down the eastern side of the eminence on which Jerusalem is built. We hear their tread over the rustic bridge thrown across the brook Cedron, which separates Jerusalem from the mount of Olives. They ascend the bank on the opposite side, and, turning to the left, are hidden from the sight by the olive trees, which shade the garden of Gethsemane.*

Let us follow the vanishing group. As we enter the enclosure, we find the main body of the disciples, eight in number, stretched upon the ground, fatigued with the exciting employments of the day, and with the undefined fears which the previous conversation of the Redeemer had excited, and probably asleep.

* Reb. and Swinton, vol. 1, 346.

Smith

Farther on is another group of three, Peter, James and John, whom Christ had taken with him, as witnesses to the overwhelming grief that oppressed him; they are likewise fatigued and slumbering.

At a little distance from these is the Redeemer himself, struggling in solitude with a weight of agony, which we can neither realize nor comprehend. Upon the whole, the moon is looking calmly down from its zenith, relieving the gloomy shadows of the dark green olive trees with broken patches of silvery light.

The dark cloud of sorrow into which the Saviour had now entered, had some time before cast its shadow over his spirit. A saddened hue was imparted to all he did at the communion-table. His conversation there is upon mournful themes, and he evidently labors to prepare his disciples for what they must pass through. His last prayer is meltingly pathetic. He acknowledges, in the beginning, that his hour has come,—that all-important hour, for which the whole previous life of Christ, and indeed the whole history of the world, had been preparing;

that hour in which Jesus must be extended as a sacrifice upon the altar of Divine Justice, for our indignities to the divine law, that offers of pardon might be extended to us; — the gloom of this hour enveloped Jesus in its outer folds as he commended his followers to the Father, in the tenderest prayer ever uttered. The disciples participate in its tender spirit; and when they leave the room to go once more to their accustomed retreat on the mount of Olives, they pace the deserted, moon-lit streets in sorrowful silence, by the side of their Master, nursing their apprehensions as they behold his melancholy, subdued countenance.

What must have been the feelings of the Son of Man at that moment! for in this character alone we now contemplate him. One of his little company had already slipped away to the high priest's palace, and he well knew his errand, and his deplorable end. Those who were now sadly walking by his side, he knew were extremely weak in confidence, and would, in a few hours, flee from him in terror. He looked at the silent houses, — he knew that on the morrow their

inmates would pour forth to witness his crucifixion. His human feelings — for in this he was made like unto his brethren — struggle in his breast, and, turning to his silent companions, he said: “All ye shall be offended because of me this night; for it is written, I will smite the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad. But after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee.” Peter pressed up to him to vindicate himself from the charge.—“Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended.” But said the Saviour, “Verily I say unto thee, that this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice.” Still he would not believe it, and reasserted his fidelity.—“Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee.” Likewise also said all the disciples.*

Again they walk on in silence, each revolving what had been said, and catching by sympathy the sorrow which continued to deepen in the countenance of the Redeemer. As they pass the brook and enter the garden, this sorrow becomes too deep to be borne in

* See Matt. xxvi. 30-35.

silence. To the chosen three, whom he took with him into the interior of the grove, the Saviour says, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death."* They knew it before, for he had already begun to be sorrowful and very heavy. † The internal struggle and anguish of his spirit, is depicted in his countenance; and, under its pressure, he seeks relief in prayer. Having commanded his disciples to watch and pray, that *they* might not enter into temptation, ‡ he withdraws from them a few paces to pour forth his soul before God, and to endure the unutterable agony which has ever since clad Gethsemane in the habiliments of wo.

At first he falls upon his knees; then, as his earnestness increases, he prostrates himself on his face upon the earth. "With strong crying and tears," § yet with the most affecting submission, he prays, "O, my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt." ||

* Matt. xxvi. 38.

† Luke xxii. 40, comp. Mark xiv. 34.

‡ Matt. xxvi. 37.

§ Heb. v. 7.

|| There is a verbal discrepancy in the petition in the different evangelists; but we may suppose that they have given us a

What a model of earnest, yet submissive supplication! What moving, anxious entreaty! yet what a confiding surrender of the whole case to the will of God! When you are assaulted with temptation, O, Christian, flee to the garden of Gethsemane, and, sitting upon the fallen trunk of one of its old, gray, moss-grown olives, learn from the wrestlings of the Captain of our salvation, *how yourself to wrestle and pray*: when the cup of affliction is poured out for you to drink, go listen to the broken language of the agonizing Son of Man, and learn, in his chastened submission, how to say, "Not my will, but Thine be done."

The Redeemer rises from the ground, and returns to his disciples. He has obtained no relief from his burden of anguish, and he visits them, by the instinct of our nature, for sympathy. But instead of finding them watching and praying against temptation, as he had directed them, they are stretched upon the grass in a troubled sleep.

Are we to blame the disciples? Was it

free version of the transaction, or that this petition was several times repeated, and each has reported a different form.

through indifference and a love of their own ease, that they had so soon fallen asleep? That we may decide understandingly, we must remember that it was now midnight, when nature strongly demands rest; that they had been occupied in the busy and exciting duties of the preparation for the Passover, and of the Passover itself; that the Saviour had lifted the veil of the morrow, and had clearly, though generally, shown them the scenes through which he and they must pass; that he should be betrayed by Judas, deserted by themselves, and die at the hands of their countrymen; that they had all the evening seen wave after wave of grief beat against the spirit of their beloved Master, and had seen him just now prostrated and entreating under a weight of sorrow which they could neither remove nor alleviate. Is it strange, that when they sat down in silence by one of the venerable olives of the garden, drowsiness should creep upon them and they should sink down to sleep? One evangelist directly declares that they slept for sorrow,* so deep was their sympathy in the depression of their

*Luke xxii. 45.

Lord. Such a fact is not unique. Others have slept under the pressure of intense grief arising from sudden affliction, or expected and near death.

The words of Christ on his return are not ~~to~~ ^{ed to} oppose the view I have taken. "What! could ye not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." Here is a rebuke, indeed, but it is addressed to Peter, because he had particularly exposed himself to it by his self-confident protestations of fidelity, but who now, in an hour after his courageous resolution, is overcome by his own bodily weakness. With this delicate rebuke is conveyed one of the most affectionate apologies we can conceive of. — "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." Thy disposition is good, but thou canst not accomplish that to which thy sympathies would urge thee! T'is as well. My conflict thou canst not fight for me.

Again Jesus returns to the throne of grace, "saying the same words;" again he revisits his disciples, and again leaves them.

This repeated departing and returning shows the depth of the distress that bears him down. But after his third departure, and during his third prayer, we have an unparalleled exhibition of the weight of his sorrow. Says the evangelist Luke, with touching simplicity: "And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat was, as it were, great drops of blood falling down to the ground." Deeply intense must have been the suffering of the spirit that wrought so powerfully upon the physical nature! inconceivably intense, that could so operate upon the emotions of the perfect man Christ Jesus, whose whole nature was under just and complete control! Recollect, again, that it was past the middle of the night, and cold, too—so cold that the soldiers who came to arrest him, built a fire afterwards to warm themselves; that the Saviour was in a shady valley into which the warmth of the sun penetrated but for a few hours during the middle of the day, and where the chill fogs of the season settled in the damp evening. Yet *here*, the agony of Jesus throws him into an entire perspiration, and forces the blood through

the pores of the skin, till it stands in large clammy drops upon the surface, staining his garments, and falling down to the ground. What mighty weight of grief is it that here presses open that fountain of blood which ceases not to flow till the heart is exhausted on the cross?

During this, his agony, and in his last prayer, an answer is vouchsafed to him from the Father. An angel descends from heaven and strengthens him. He brings the message of the Father from the throne of Justice, to the man Christ Jesus, and he is consoled by it. The look of deep dejection and distress passes from his brow, and he rises from the earth and returns to his disciples. While he is giving to them his last warning in the flesh, a warning to watch and pray, the cautious tread of the traitor and his band, falls upon his ear, and he is led away by them, "like a lamb to the slaughter," to drink of a cup which Justice poured out for us.

This scene has connected with the garden of Gethsemane a gloom deeper than the shade which dwells under its dark green olive-trees, and which infuses a feeling of

sympathetic sadness into the breast of every Christian traveller that sits within its dilapidated enclosures. But I cannot leave the contemplation of this scene without pondering a moment upon its cause, and asking the reader to do the same.

Why was the Saviour thus bowed down in unprecedented sorrow? He had no sins, no compunctions of his own to harrow up his soul with remorse. He was of no timorous disposition to shrink from the bodily pain of dying. Others have embraced the stake and have gone rejoicing to the cross, and we cannot think so irreverently of the Son of God as to suppose him inferior in physical or moral courage, to frail, sinful men. We cannot admit that He who is *our example* endured all this agony through apprehension of the insults of the Jews, and the cruelties of the Romans. No. He came voluntarily here, when he knew Judas' plans, and that here he would seek him. He went voluntarily before the sanhedrim. He asked no help from Peter, none from his attendant guards of angels. He went voluntarily to the cross. He came to die on the cross, and "he was straitened

till it was accomplished.”* It was not, I am confident, his simple passage through the scenes before him, that whelmed him in this agony. He cannot be our Saviour from death and hell if he quailed before the tortures of the cross. There must have been either another or a superadded cause of his overwhelming sorrow; one far greater in comparison than this. What weight of sorrow, then, was it that oppressed the Son of God in the garden of Gethsemane? We may expect to find it in the earnest supplications that he then offered. He prayed for deliverance; but from what? “O, my Father, if it be possible, let *this cup* pass from me.” Mark declares,† that he “prayed that, if it were possible, *the hour* might pass from him.” The sources of his sufferings he designates by the term “*cup*” and “*hour* ;” a term which he often employed to denote his death and its attendant circumstances. We cannot suppose that his prayer respected his present distress, for “the cup” was still before him after the agony was past; as he directly intimates in his rebuke of Peter when he drew his sword in his Master’s defence;

* See Luke xii. 50.

† Mark xiv. 35.

“Put up thy sword into the sheath; *the cup* which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?”* Besides, the supposition that “*the cup*” referred to his present agony, still leaves the agony itself unaccounted for. We are evidently to seek the cause in something connected with the death that now drew near to him apace.

An evident allusion to this suffering of Christ, in Hebrews, will cast light upon the present inquiry. “Who, [that is, Christ,] in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save him from death, and *was heard in that he feared*; though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered.”† There was something connected with the cross, which our Redeemer feared; something which led him to pray that its excruciating sufferings might pass from him. It was not the bodily anguish of the cross, nor its ignominy in the eyes of the world which he feared, but he looked upon his prospective sufferings as connected with the impugned

* John xviii. 11.

† Heb. v. 7, 8.

authority of God's holy law. The cross was to him different from that which triumphant martyrs have embraced. Though an ignorant spectator would have seen no particular difference between the three that were erected on Calvary, yet there was a difference inconceivable; Jesus saw it in all its gloomy, oppressive reality. Around that on which he was to suffer, lowered, in dark folds, the cloud of the wrath of God against sin. Into that cloud he must enter, and endure what the Divine Justice demanded as a satisfaction to its violated claims. For this purpose he came into the world, to die on the cross — not as a martyr to the truth of his doctrines — not that he might prove the certainty of the resurrection by raising himself from the dead — but as a vicarious sacrifice, the just for the unjust.

When he entered upon his public ministry, the arch-apostate was allowed to use all his artifices to allure him from his purpose. Failing, he departed from him for a season, but only to return, not in seductive adulations, but in terrors, as the Captain of our salvation drew near to the completion of his work of

redemption. The battle was *now* to be fought again with the earnestness of a decisive conflict. On the Redeemer's fidelity to the great object of his incarnation, depended, not the salvation of all the elect only, and of himself, but the honor of God, and the accomplishment of all his great designs of creation and redemption. If the man Christ Jesus could be diverted from his work, even by the indulgence of a single sinful thought, Satan would triumph. These infinite results, the Son of Man knew were suspended upon his obedience unto death. His foe was allowed to delineate them before his mind in all their overwhelming magnitude, and to harass his mind with the possibility of his falling beneath them. May not such a possibility be that which he feared, and in respect to which fear he was heard, being strengthened by a message from the Father, like the voice from heaven, on a similar occasion. "I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again." *

We may not aver, concerning the causes of the Saviour's deep struggle, with too much confidence, lest we venture beyond what is

* John xii. 27, 28.

written ; but we are told, in the passage previously quoted from Hebrews, that “ though Christ were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered.” His obedience to the great object of his advent, his obedience even unto death, through all the shrinkings of a sinless humanity, and through all the malicious suggestions of hell, was manifested in a most moving and triumphant manner in the agonizing prayer that arose from his lips in the garden of Gethsemane. Not all the malignant devices of Satan ; not all the horrors he could fling around the cross, could there tempt him to an insubmissive thought ! Though the responsibility of a world’s redemption was rolled upon him — though he must stand the representative of an apostate race, and bear the wrath of God against their sins — he came out from the struggle triumphant ; but the weight crushed, as it were, the life-blood from his body, and caused it to distil to the earth in the intensity of his mental anguish. The Son of Man wrestling in his agony with his invisible foes, is like a stately ship exposed on a lee-shore to the sweeping fury of

the fiercest gales, and with the breakers roaring in the gloom under her bows. Every life on her crowded deck hangs upon the strength of a few ropes and bolts. With intense anxiety they feel her quivering timbers, while the stunning waves beat her to leeward, and threaten them instant destruction upon the boiling surges. But the point is doubled, and, though the storm continues to rage, the gallant craft is in an open sea, and her little world of beings are comparatively safe. And thus Jesus remained firm in the blasts from ~~that~~^{the} pit. God left the man Christ Jesus alone, but he stood. His obedience was tested to the utmost, and it was shown to be superior to every assault and every fear. "Having loved his own that were in the world, he loved them unto the end."

The scene we have now contemplated is but the preparation of the Passover sacrifice; it is but the evening of the Saviour's night of pain; the foretaste of the cross; the dawning of the display of everlasting love. It is Jesus but girding on and trying his armor.

While we contemplate him thus bowed down with anguish by the weight of our sins,

may the melting influence of his love penetrate and soften our hearts! And may this perfect submission under the severest temptations shame our repinings under momentary trials!

“Go to the Garden, sinner! see
 Those precious drops that flow;
 The heavy load he bore for thee—
 For thee he lies so low!

“There learn of him the cross to bear,
 Thy Father’s will obey;
 And when temptations press thee near,
 Awake to watch and pray.”

CHAPTER II.

The Treachery and the Arrest.

SCRIPTURE NARRATIVE. Matt. xxvi. 14-16, 47-26; xxvii. 3-5.
 Mark xiv. 10-11, 43-50. — Luke xxii. 3-6, 47-53. — John xviii.
 3-11. — Acts. i. 16-18.

WHILE the Saviour is standing in conference with his disciples, the sound of many a step is heard coming up the footpaths of the garden, and many a fitful gleam of light

glances around among the trees. A body of armed men, with lanterns, draw near to the little company of Christ and his followers. But to understand who these intruders are, and what are their intentions, we must go back in our narrative a few days, and trace down the measures of the Jewish chief priests.

At each return of the Jewish festival, the Redeemer had visited Jerusalem, and had fearlessly proclaimed the humbling doctrines of the spiritual worship which he came to establish. The popularity of Christ among the common people, "who heard him gladly," highly exasperated the aristocracy. Their depraved hearts, wedded to the pride of place and self-righteousness, hated him who stripped them of their robes of sanctity, and brought them down below publicans and harlots. In their attempts to entrap him in his speech, and humble him by proposing perplexities, he had given them most humiliating defeats. They saw his principles spreading; even some of the sanhedrims were suspected of being converts to his heavenly teachings; they saw their own star waning and setting in night before the pro-

gress of this "true light," this rising Sun of Righteousness. The people, that source of anxiety to all in usurped places, began, at every national gathering, to inquire "What think ye, that he will not come to the feast?" Each new miracle extended the wave of interest and speculation more widely from mind to mind. A notable one had just been performed, which was so prominent in the public knowledge, and so striking in itself, as to excite the most anxious apprehension and alarm in the breasts of the tottering hierarchy.

In the little village of Bethany had lived a man, well known in Jerusalem, named Lazarus, an intimate friend of Jesus. At his house, Christ had often retired from the bustle of Jerusalem, to enjoy the quiet and affection of a domestic circle. While he was absent, death had invaded the favored roof, and clad the sisters in mourning for their brother. Many of the Jews, their relatives, and acquaintances, went out from the city, to comfort them in their affliction. Thus the fact of his death had become widely and certainly known. But not to detail particularly, Jesus delayed his return until the fourth day, that

^{the}~~this~~ greatness of his power might be the more manifested. Then, when corruption had begun its work, he, with a word, called forth the decaying body from its tomb. Astonishment seized the beholders. The intelligence of the miracle flew with the rapidity of the wind. Numbers flocked to behold him that was returned from the invisible world, and to convince their wondering unbelief by the sight of their own eyes. The report reached the ears of the chief priests, and awakened the utmost alarm in their breasts. And well it might. The arm of the Lord had been revealed at their very doors. They ^{could}~~did~~ not deny the miracle; too many were acquainted with the facts; and the scene was too near for them to expect the excitement to subside, as rumors from a distance usually do. Bethany was ^{three}~~less~~ than ^{three} miles from Jerusalem, and all who would might visit the spot for a solution of their queries. No way of escape seemed to present itself to them but to remove Christ immediately from public notice.

In this dilemma the council is assembled — not a regular meeting of the sanhedrim, but a faction — that the mind of the official power

might be sounded, and a course of proceeding decided upon. In this assembly, the high priest, Caiaphas, reveals the spirit which actuated him, and, we may suppose, all the rest, in their subsequent revengeful measures. The common argument of their lips is, "What do we? for this man doeth many miracles. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him: and the Romans shall come, and take away our place and nation."* This was their reason — "all men will believe on *him!*" — and by consequence *they* would be justly forsaken.

As a result of their deliberations, if they deserve the name, it is voted that Christ should die; "and from that day forth they took counsel together for to put him to death."† We are informed‡ that the necessity of putting Lazarus also to death, was debated at this time, although the result we are not told.

Jesus was apprized probably of all their deliberations, and of their purpose to silence him by death if necessary, before the arrival of the Passover. Accordingly, he withdrew a short time to the city Ephraim, about eight

* John xi. 47, 48. † John xi. 53. ‡ John xii. 10, 11.

miles north of Jerusalem. Here he remained until the week before the Passover, when he returned again to Bethany, and spent this last earthly Sabbath in the flesh, with the again happy family of Lazarus.

The chief priests, thus far disappointed, still continue their conclaves, devising measures for silencing this troublesome teacher. He had grown more bold in his addresses to the people, and more personal in his exposures of their hypocrisy. He had made a triumphant entry into the holy city; and the multitude had greeted him with hosannas, and hailed him as the son of David, coming in the name of the Lord. He had driven the buyers and sellers out of the temple, and when they had demanded by what authority he took upon himself these responsibilities, he had most pointedly condemned their gross assumptions, in that severe but just parable of the vineyard.*

The Passover was now but two days distant; and though the enemies of Christ had industriously employed spies, "who feigned themselves just men—that is, believers in

* Matt. xxi. 33-44.

him — that they might take hold of his words, that so they might deliver him unto the power of the governor,”* yet they had been effectually foiled in their attempts.

Matthew admits us into one of their councils, held on Wednesday, the day before the Passover, and the day but one before the crucifixion. Their purpose has now become more definitely settled, and their plan of operations more clearly manifest. They now consult “that they might take Jesus by subtlety and kill him.”† Once get him into their hands, and escape for him will be hopeless. They did not dare to make a public arrest of the Redeemer in Jerusalem, because they feared an uproar among the people; there being, as it is computed, no less than three million of people assembled in the city at the time of the feasts, — a tumultuous company, ready for a disturbance upon any thing which they fancied affected their prerogatives. Not daring, therefore, to take Jesus publicly, they resort to hidden measures, industriously circulating placards, as it seems from John, ‡ to this intent, that “If any man knew where he

* Luke xx. 20.

† Matt. xxvi. 4.

‡ John xi. 57.

were, he should show it, that they might take him;” they meant to come upon him in some of his nightly retreats in the suburbs, for he spent only the day in Jerusalem. It was the sight of one of these placards, probably, that first suggested to Judas, the diabolical scheme of delivering his Master for the offered reward.

In all these previous proceedings, we are struck with the determined prejudice of the Jewish rulers, and with the baseness of the motives which actuated them in their unhal- lowed schemes. As was said above, the sacred historian, with the utmost frankness, has admitted us to their secret conclaves, and has allowed our ears to hear their envenomed speeches, where every one comes with his mind resolved only to whet the others’ appetite for innocent blood.

This conclave of the chief priests and Pharisees was probably not a regular meeting of the sanhedrim, for the Pharisees are mentioned as a sect, who were not, as such, members of the national council. It was rather a general gathering of the nobility, whose insolent authority was endangered by the teachings

of Jesus. If it were a regular assembly, they dissolved themselves virtually by their irregularities; which are too obvious to escape notice. For example, we have the high priest, who was, *ex officio*, president of the sanhedrim, and therefore not allowed to give his opinion, except in equally-balanced questions, haranguing the rest, and inciting them to put Jesus to death. Again, they passed no decree in a legal manner; that is, by first citing Jesus to appear before them and make his defence. No; but without an examination, without testimony, they first determined to put him to death, and then proceeded to discuss the measures whereby they might take him so as not to provoke a disturbance among the people. For the people, they felt, would not see the teacher snatched from them who so boldly resisted the onerous traditions of the elders, and who so effectually laid bare the proud pretensions of their blind guides, the Scribes and Pharisees.

Let us now turn to the Man against whom “principalities, and powers, and spiritual wickedness in high places” have been thus moved — to him who was holy, harmless, un-

defiled and separate from sinners"—who was daily teaching in the temple, but on whom they did not dare to lay their hands till they had estimated their strength.

Jesus Christ knew all that was before him. He had known it from the beginning of his ministry. As the Son, he knew it in eternity, when he dwelt in the bosom of the Father. To pass through these very scenes of envy, hatred, persecution, suffering, and death, was the great object of his advent in the world, that, by his sufferings and death, he might open a way through which the mercy of God might, consistently with divine justice, display itself in recovering the seed of Christ.

Accordingly, he took measures that the purposes of God respecting this glorious object should be fulfilled. When he called his disciples in the beginning of his ministry, he perfectly knew their then characters and their future conduct, and he chose them that they might act the part which they did act. So he told them at their last meeting at the Pass-over. "I know whom I have chosen."—I know your characters, and I chose you because you had such characters; "that the

scriptures might be fulfilled, ‘He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me.’”*

Among all the actors in the great tragedy we are sketching, none have been more notorious than Judas. It will not be considered too wide a digression to follow the progressive steps of his downward career previous to his fatal plunge. For it will be remembered, that one important, though a minor, object of the minute narrative of the close of the Saviour’s life is to instruct by the developements of human character therein made.

We have but little certain knowledge of the early history of Judas, though tradition has been diligent to collect and hand down many tattered legends respecting him.

His was a common name among the Jews being the patronymic of one whole tribe, the children of Judah. There are three of the name mentioned in the New Testament; one was called also Jude, and Lebbeus or Thaddeus or Theudas, — an apostle and author of the epistle Jude, and who inquired at the Last Supper, “Lord, how is it that thou wilt mani-

* John xiii. 18.

fest thyself unto us, and not unto the world,"* — the other was surnamed Barsabas, and was one of the two whom the church at Jerusalem sent as delegates to the churches in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia, with their letters respecting circumcision. Probably he is the same who, with Mathias, was nominated to the apostleship made vacant by the suicide of Judas, the traitor, and the third of this name. He is distinguished by the patril, Iscariot: that is, the man of Carioth, a small village which fell to the tribe of Judah, in the division of the land of Canaan.† His father's name was Simon. Judas first figures before us in the list of disciples whom Christ sent forth, in pairs, to proclaim the gospel in the cities and villages of the Jews. After his return, he became treasurer of the scanty funds which the Saviour carried for supplying his few wants, and for the relief of the poor. For he, who was less richly accommodated than the birds of the air, and the burrowing foxes of the hillside, did not deem himself excused from ministering, of the meagre pittance that fell to him from others, to the temporal wants of

* John xiv. 22.

† Joshua xv. 25.

sinners. Of these Judas was made the almoner; probably from his known tact in pecuniary matters, and perhaps because he loved the fingering of the few pence that were put into the bag. But it proved a ruinous trust. It fostered his avarice. With the tempting mammon in his hand, he resisted not the temptation to embezzle it to his own use, and cheat his Lord and his fellow-disciples of their honest confidence. John expressly declares that "he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein."* There is no doubt that Judas abstracted all he dared from the common stock. On this occasion, when the above title was applied to him, he was meditating the rich addition to his hoards from the three hundred pence for which Mary's box of ointment might have been sold in the market. It was a grievous wound to the avaricious spirit of this covetous traitor, to see so much wasted in the useless anointing of Jesus' feet. It was as so much taken from his very pocket, and his heart-burning regret

* John xii. 6. To bear, signifies also to carry away, to steal as a thief does, and is so to be understood here, as this use alone justifies the title of thief bestowed upon Judas.

broke forth in a lamentation of crocodile tears for the poor. But could he have obtained the three hundred pence into his custody, little better would the poor have been for his interested pity.

The Saviour overheard his selfish advice, and administered to him a deserved rebuke for his covert avarice. For "Jesus understood it."* His temper and his dishonest practices were none of them hidden from him who "knew perfectly what was in man." Nettled at this reproof, it is more than probable that Judas, from that time, meditated revenge for his exposure.

He had been into Jerusalem on the days previous to this occurrence with the disciples. He then became acquainted, perhaps in the way already suggested, with the murderous designs of the chief priests. The diabolical plan of treachery, flashed across his mind like a sulphurous gleam of lurid light from the pit. What his feelings were, the spirit of inspiration has not informed us. His course of conduct is hidden in darkness. We are only told that, on the next day, he hired him-

* Matt. xxvi. 10.

hired

self "to the chief priests and captains, and communed with them how he might betray him;" "and they were glad, and covenanted to give him money, and he promised and sought opportunity to betray him unto them, in the absence of the multitude."* No doubt they were glad. They had been tasking their brains for several days to devise some effectual way of silencing this innovator, who claimed the seal and authority of Jehovah; and as they thus sat in conclave, day after day, foaming in their impotent malice, that they dared not publicly seize Jesus at the temple, and that they knew not his night retreats, where they could secretly arrest and destroy him, they were near despairing lest he should escape their fury. Their own skill had failed to entrap him; their spies could detect no inconsistency in him. No man had brought them word where he privately resorted. But in their dilemma, a dark-browed, sinister-looking man, stealthily and cautiously glides into their midst. Hastily glancing an uneasy eye around him, with a meaning gesture to one of their placards, which he holds

* Luke xxii. 4, 5, 6.

up in the other hand, he whispers, "What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you?" He calls no names, for they understand one another. The priests and Pharisees had often seen him among the immediate attendants of Christ. A nod and a triumphant smile run around the assembly, as much as to say, 'He's one of the twelve, and he knows his retreat!' "And they were glad!"—aye! for now they would track the Lion of the tribe of Judah to his sequestered haunts, and could pounce upon him as he couched himself in his lair.

No sooner had Judas made his nefarious proposal than the bargain is concluded, and they promise him thirty pieces of silver, about fifteen dollars, as soon as the victim shall be safe in their hands. The preliminary measures are debated, and a band promised to attend him to arrest Jesus, whenever he finds a safe opportunity to guide them to him. Judas takes his departure, gloating over the reward, and counting the ways in which he shall enjoy the gains of ungodliness; and he goes with the disguised, but hearty contempt of those who make him the willing tool of their

malice. But O, Judas! little dost thou think how much remorse of conscience thou hast bought with thy thirty pieces of silver!

How obviously is the hand of God in this transaction! Why did not Judas ask more for his price, when he knew the anxiety of the rulers to get his Master into their hands? and why should they have selected the exact price of a *slave*, as fixed by the Mosaic law? and why should the sum be the *exact amount* at which the prophet predicted Christ should be valued? "If ye think good, give me my price; and if not, forbear. So they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver."* They did it that they might show their contempt of Christ; but God's agency was in it, that the scriptures might be fulfilled, which he had before determined should be done. Had these scribes of the law but known the law as they pretended, their eyes might have been seasonably opened; but they were *blind* guides.

Judas hurried back to Jesus and his disciples, and joined them not without an elation of spirit, partly natural at his prospective income, partly forced that they might not sus-

* Zech. xi. 12.

pect his premeditated treachery. But Jesus knew it all, and when he saw the unfaithful disciple slide in among the rest, he read his whole deed in the chuckling satisfaction of his dark soul.

It was on Thursday, (of our time,) and the preparation of the Passover. Our Saviour had sent two of his disciples, Peter and John, into Jerusalem, to make the necessary arrangements. Towards evening, he left Bethany once more, and for the last time, to go into the city. At the appointed hour, they gather around the table of the Passover. Judas is with them. None of his fellow-disciples harbor any suspicion of him, though Christ had lately often said that he should be betrayed at this present time. Let us look in upon the little company. The usual ceremonies are partly concluded. Jesus has just washed the disciples' feet, and now reclines with a troubled and saddened countenance, contemplating his followers. His words, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, one of *you* shall betray me," have cast a gloom over the whole group. They know how the hierarchy without are thirsting for his blood, but they had not sup-

posed that dark treachery could lurk in any breast of their small number. With undisguised astonishment they look to one another, and to their Master, with the anxious inquiry trembling on their lips, "Lord, is it I?" Jesus is affected with their sensitiveness to the suspicion of such guilt, and, to relieve their anxiety, says: "He that dippeth his hand with me in the dish, the same shall betray me." Peter, wishing to know more definitely, beckons to John, who reclines next to Jesus, and whispers to him to ask Jesus whom he intended. He gives John a sign by which he may know. He takes a piece of the unleavened bread, and dips it into the sauce of bitter herbs that stood near Judas, and gives it to him to eat. Such an act was frequently done by the master of the feast; but, in this instance, it designated to John, the traitor, and was a hint to Judas that Christ completely understood his nefarious project. The face of the false disciple is crimsoned with confusion at his detection. Jesus says to him, in a tone loud enough for all to hear, "That thou doest, do quickly." It is not a command to him to go on in his project, but rather to decide upon

the spot, now that he is detected, whether he will go forward in his base design, or whether he will relent and confess all. The traitor is stung with enmity at his discovery,—for Satan now had full possession of him; he thinks of the money which was almost in his hand, but which he would lose if he failed in his engagement, and, flinging a glance of revengeful defiance and chagrin at his Lord, he rises from the table, and walks out of the room. As soon as he goes, Christ institutes the communion, and utters the affecting instructions and prayer which occupy several of the closing chapters of the gospel of John.

Let us leave him, and follow Judas. The moon has been up some two hours, and imperfectly illuminates with its cold light, one side of the street. He crosses over to the side which is in the shade, and hurries along with his face partly concealed in his outer garment, that he may not be detected by the passengers whom he may chance to meet. A short walk brings him to the house of the high priest, where the rulers are waiting for him. With a greeting such as fiends give when they pass one another, walking to and fro over the

earth on errands of evil, did they welcome among them "the son of perdition." After the lapse of an hour or two, to give Jesus time to repair to his usual retreat on the mount of Olives, which is spent by the motley group who are to accompany him in sociable preparation, the traitor sallies forth again at the head of his band. They ~~stand~~^{steal} along with their glimmering lanterns through dark passages, and narrow, unfrequented alleys, occasionally revealed by the oblique moonlight, till they pass the walls of the city. A few minutes' walk more brings them into the enclosure of the garden where we left Jesus and his disciples in the beginning of the chapter.

A rapid summary of the arrest of Christ is all that is necessary to the present purpose.

Judas had previously given the band that accompanied him a sign by which they might be sure to seize the right man, as probably they were ignorant of the person to be apprehended. "Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he; hold him fast;" for he had before glided invisibly away from the hands of his enemies. With this precautionary direction, the false-hearted disciple advances boldly up

to his Master, with the language of friendship upon his lips, but treachery in his heart, and gives the preconcerted signal. Jesus met his hollow-hearted salutation with a touching rebuke which, in the end, drove Judas to despair. The motley band, when they learn whom they are to arrest, or from some preternatural awe which the composed, dignified presence of Jesus inspired, shrink backwards, and fall to the ground. Christ repeats the inquiry, "Whom seek ye?" and demands that his disciples shall not be molested. As they recover from their momentary panic, finding that he submits so passively, they gather about him to confine him; but the ardent Peter draws his sword, and attacks one of the most officious of the band. Jesus rebukes his misguided zeal, in resisting what he knew not but might be *the civil power*, and heals the wound which his random blow had inflicted, hinting that his mistaken kindness was in opposition to the great object of his life, — "drinking the cup which the Father had given him;"* and that, if he needed any succor, with a word he could summon twelve legions of angels to his assistance.

* John xviii. 11.

The band, in revenge of their recent trepidation, secure Jesus strongly with cords tightly drawn about his arms. The disciples, alarmed at their brutal treatment of their Master, and fearing for themselves, fled with precipitation. A young man who heard the disturbance, and seizing his night-covering came out to learn the cause, is obliged to leave his outer garment behind him, to escape from the hands of some of the band. With the victim in their power, whom they came to seize, the menials of the chief priests hasten cautiously back to their employers.

Of Judas nothing is here recorded. Probably he lingered along behind the company, to get his pay of the council with whom he had bargained to incur this great guilt. But, like all who serve for the wages of unrighteousness, he found his wages to be the bane of his peace. When his part was acted, and he came to contemplate what he had done, treachery appeared to him far different from what it did when gilded with a prospective reward. If he hung around the high priest's court, to witness what would be done with Jesus, his Master's calm, unruffled serenity,

under the mocking of his prejudiced judges, might have first pierced the selfish coatings of his heart; or, if he hasted to solitude to enjoy his ill-gotten gains, the solitude might have brought him to bitter self-reproaches. Whatever was the immediate cause, God did not leave him many hours undisturbed in the possession of his blood-stained silver.

His abode and his thoughts, during the night following his deed, are wrapt in darkness. But in the morning he appears again. Pale and haggard, with the torments of the lost gnawing in his soul, he stalks into the temple where his tempters in iniquity are rejoicing over their success; he darts his blood-shotten eyes upon the surrounding priests, and, with the price of his soul lying in his extended palm, exclaims in the hollow accents of despair, "I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood." Most valuable testimony to the innocence of Christ! His betrayer could find nothing in all his spotless life—after the closest intimacy of three years—nothing which could at all satisfy his condemning conscience with the shadow of an extenuation for his conduct. He confessed it,

even *he* who would have justified himself, had it been possible, in the deed which now filled him with remorse. Such explicit testimony to the Saviour's innocence from such a source, ought to have stopped the malicious proceedings of the Jewish rulers, and have shown them the remorse which might seize them for their awful guilt. But no! With the utmost contempt they inhumanly retort upon the supple tool of their purposes, "What is that to us? see thou to that!" as much as to say, 'What have we to do with his innocence. He must die. Settle the guilt of your participation with yourself; we will none of it.' Judas must go somewhere else than to his abettors in iniquity for the relief from the reproaches of conscience; having accomplished their desires, they discard the panderer to their villainy. With this cutting answer, they turn away from the money which he holds out to them. 'Tis the reward of iniquity! keep it, Judas, as all the comfort thou hast. No! he disdains the harmless silver; and, throwing it upon the pavement at their feet, he hurries away from their presence. Goaded by a remorseful and despairing conscience, he hastes

to the nearest solitary place. All his guilt stares him in the face. All the tender instructions of his former Master crowd before him, made tenfold more lovely by their contrast with the dark, turbulent passions which now dash over his defiled soul. The meek aspect of Jesus haunts his imagination, like a placid moon gazing upon the heaving billows of the ocean. He cannot pray. Dark thoughts of hell and everlasting despair, goad on the wretched man. Devils menace him as their own. His depraved heart rises in rebellion against his Maker. He curses the day in which he was born — the day in which he obtained “the bag” — the day in which he first saw the chief priests. Driven on by the tempest in his bosom, and seeing no relief in this world, dreadful purposes respecting another flash through his mind. The grave is gloomy before him, but it is untried. Rather than quail at uncertainties, he determines to rush on, uncalled, and know the worst that awaits him. He seizes the nearest rope, and fastening it to the most elevated place at hand, he suspends himself by the neck ; but the support is too weak for his weight, and

“he falls headlong upon the ground, and bursts asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gush out.”* Thus horridly ends the probation of him who was seduced by the love of money to sell his Lord and his God! “The Son of Man goeth as it is written of him,” exclaimed the Saviour, prophetically; but “wo unto that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! it had been good for that man if he had not been born.” †

I have followed the history of this miserable man to its close, that the awful lesson of his end might deter us from the beginning of his career. The prominence of that history forbids our passing on without stopping a moment in the present narrative, and, as it were, standing by the grave, and looking in upon the mangled remains of the suicide, reading the memento which God has engraved upon his tomb-stone.

I. ALL MANKIND WILL NOT BE SAVED.

One, certainly, is not an inhabitant of heaven, and will not ever be. Judas is in hell. Christ declared respecting his disciples,

* Acts i. 18.

† Matt. xxvi. 24.

“None of them is lost but the son of perdition; that the scriptures might be fulfilled.”* Judas he repeatedly called the son of perdition; that is, according to the Hebrew idiom, the lost man, the deservedly destroyed.

The apostles, in a solemn prayer at the selection of a new apostle, declared that Judas had gone to his own place; † namely, to perdition, of which he was the son and heir. But still more decidedly has our Saviour pronounced his fate. “Wo unto that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed; it had been good for that man if he had not been born.” ‡ Now, if he entered heaven as soon as he committed suicide, there to welcome his Lord, whom he had outstripped in his course, is not his existence a blessing to him? Is he not happy, if now in heaven? Nay, if he were doomed to suffer the extremities of torment, for any given length of time, however protracted, though millions of ages, and then be admitted to the abodes of the blessed to spend the remainder of eternity, what would that finite period of suffering be, compared with all succeeding endless enjoyment of the bliss

* John xvii. 12.

† Acts i. 25.

‡ Matthew xxvi. 24.

of heaven? Let unprejudiced, common sense answer, whether, if Judas be ever made a partaker of the joys of salvation, his birth will not be a blessing to himself; whether his enjoyment will not overbalance his previous misery? The conclusion is inevitable. Judas can never be saved. He must dwell forever in despair. And if he is lost, we have no reason to suppose that Cain is not lost,—that the antediluvians, Sodom and Gomorrah, Pharaoh, and all who die in their sins, are not lost. Judas, and all who resemble him in character, at death, are suffering the vengeance of eternal fire, or we are not to credit the word of Christ that he had been better not to have been born.

II. WICKED MEN VOLUNTARILY ACCOMPLISH THE PURPOSES OF GOD.

The career of Judas was marked out and foretold before his existence. His act at the last Passover, by which he was made known to John as the traitor; namely, his dipping his hand in a dish with the Redeemer, was predicted by the mouth of David. “Mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did

eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me.”* Christ applies this prediction to Judas. “I speak not of you all: I know whom I have chosen: but that the scriptures might be fulfilled, he that hath eaten bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me.”† Christ often predicted his treachery.‡ His fearful end was equally made known centuries before his birth.§ That all this was not simply fore-known, but predetermined in the all-wise counsels of God, Peter directly and boldly affirms to the Jews: “Ye men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you, by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know; him, *being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God*, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.”|| To say that the treachery and suicide of Judas was thus predicted and determined, simply because God foreknew he would thus act, is no more nor less than a

* Psalms xli. 9.

† John xiii. 18.

‡ See Matthew xvi. 21; xvii. 22; xx. 17: Luke xxiv. 6, 7.

§ Compare Psalm lxix. 25, and cix. 8, with Acts i. 20.

|| Acts ii. 23.

solecism. A divine purpose was concerned in his conduct. The above passages will allow us to believe no less.

And yet Judas was free and responsible in these as in all his actions. This he acknowledged; “*I have sinned* in that I have betrayed the innocent blood.” Although Christ had repeatedly told him what he would do, he used not the fact as a palliation of his crime, neither did it allay the tossing of his tormented spirit, nor did it prevent his going to his own place to suffer the just penalty of his sins. We cannot but conclude that we have here a man acting freely and sinfully in fulfilling the purposes of God; and though we are involved in darkness in endeavoring to unravel the mystery, and to find where the thread of human agency joins that of divine agency, to deny there is a junction, is to cut the world loose from its Creator and Governor—is to separate cause and effect—is to erect innumerable independent petty sovereignties, jarring and clashing one with another, which the Almighty cannot control, except as he can foresee and provide against the disastrous consequences of millions of such self-acting voli-

tions. Let every cavil of a haughty self-will be hushed by the solemn query of the apostle. "Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?"*

III. GOOD RESULTS DO NOT LESSEN THE GUILT OF SIN.

Good does not flow from sin as a natural consequence; for its fruit like itself is only evil continually; but God overrules and directs sin, and makes it the occasion of the most striking and glorious exhibitions of his character and government. Sin exists in the world, not because God approves of it, neither because He is indifferent to it, nor because He cannot prevent it, but that He may make it the occasion of His praise, by securing results which otherwise could not be secured. Yet that it is the occasion of good does not lessen its guilt. This fact is strikingly manifested in the career of the traitor disciple.

Perhaps no sin has been the occasion of so many and of such blessings to the world as

* Romans ix. 20.

has been the treachery of Judas ; yet, considering all the light and knowledge which he enjoyed, it was as heinous an act as the world has ever witnessed. To betray the innocent, nay, the infinitely dignified Son of God, into the murderous hands of the spiteful chief priests ; to have it done by one on whom he had heaped inconceivably rich blessings, is felt by every one to be a crime blacker than darkness, and almost too daring for the conception of devils. And so the wretched perpetrator viewed it in his sober moments of after-reflection. No ; we are not to measure guilt by the consequences that flow from it. It is not the good which we do, but the motive from which we do it, that decides our character. It will not be any diminution of our guilt, nor addition to our reward, that blessings have been the result of our life, unless, in producing them, we aimed at the glory of God.

IV. NO ONE CAN FIX THE LIMIT BEYOND WHICH HE WILL NOT GO IN SIN.

There is no probability that when Judas joined the disciples of Christ at his command,

he had any intentions or suspicions of the awful deed which has forever branded his name as the traitor, "par excellence." Nor did he follow him from any holy motives. Probably he had no definite purpose in his acceptance. The project pleased his selfish heart. He conceived it would be for his advantage. Money was his idol, and he soon secured the charge of "the bag;" hoping, when Christ should succeed in establishing his kingdom, that he should have the farming of its ample revenues. When he first abstracted from the scanty funds of the little company, it was a little he took, which he meant to replace: but he grew emboldened, and soon kept the bag drained of its contents. He rapidly sank in guilt, and finally plunged into perdition, for the love of money. He would doubtless have resented the charge indignantly, had he been told on the day when he joined Christ, that in three years he would sell his Lord to death for the paltry price of a slave; but in that brief period how deeply he involved himself in guilt! His progress is monitory. In the monstrous wickedness of the traitor we forget the common humanity of

the man. We forget that he was once a little child, innocently smiling upon his mother's breast, as guiltless as any son of apostate Adam. While we shrink with instinctive horror from the awful results of his depravity, we forget that we have the same nature; and when admonished of our own exposedness to a similar career of guilt, we quickly retort like Hazael, "What! Is thy servant a dog that he should do this great thing?"* But such an exclamation betrays our ignorance of ourselves, and he who utters it proves that he "knows nothing yet as he ought to know!" No man can tell the extent of wickedness to which he may go if restraints are removed, and he is left to act out what is in his heart. And we should tremble therefore, when we walk among temptations, as those who carry lighted torches among casks of gunpowder; and we should daily thank God, as one of his richest blessings, that he has kept us within the bounds which he has.

There is one view in particular in which this centrifugal tendency of the heart from God, if I may so express it, should be contem-

* II Kings viii. 13.

plated; namely, as it respects those who are putting off the claims of the gospel till a more convenient season! Their impression is that they shall feel more disposed to holiness hereafter. Their neglect is based upon the assumption that they shall become morally better, certainly no worse, by delay. But the assumption is entirely unfounded. The longer the sinner lives impenitent, the deeper he sinks in guilt; the farther he wanders from God; the more callous he becomes to the influence of truth. The course of sin is like the falling stone,—increasing its velocity in a geometrical ratio. *Now* is the very best time to arrest the progress of departure from God. Every moment accelerates your downward fall. Is the reader yet a wanderer from God? Take warning from the velocity with which Judas sunk during the last few days of his life, and flee from sin to Christ now, before you reach that alarming point when appeals create no apprehension, and when sin appears in the fascinating colors of the rattlesnake—most beautiful the moment before he springs upon his hapless victim, and infixes his fatal fangs.

V. "TAKE HEED, AND BEWARE OF COVETOUSNESS."

Behold, in Judas, its deceitfulness and its danger! He was an externally correct man. His fellow-disciples never mistrusted him. Even at the last moment, when he went out to put his nefarious plan in execution, they supposed he was sent to buy something for the feast, or to give something to the poor.* Much less did the enemies of Christ discover that he had such a villainous man among his followers. Judas obtained such a control over his passion that he went undetected by human eyes, till he actually surpassed himself, and dashed down the precipice of ruin. He must have been a cool, barefaced deceiver who could, after he had bargained with the chief priests, return and join himself to his companions, and partake in the most sacred rite of the Mosaic ceremonies. So strong is the power of ^{habit} ~~instinct~~ and of hypocritical regard to forms! so absolutely and secretly may covetousness sway the heart!

Is there any thing unnatural in this hypocrisy of Judas? Is he alone in his hidden

* John xiii. 29.

guilt? No. His sin is most notorious only because he alone had the opportunity of committing it. Jesus might have chosen a thousand Judases in Israel as bad as he. He could find a thousand, to-day, who have the heart to betray his cause into enemies' hands for money, but who are unsuspected by others, and by themselves. He is only an unusual developement of a common depravity; like a poisonous tree of unusual size, because growing in a peculiarly rich soil, which yet, in all other respects, is exactly like all the little stunted shoots which live in shaded or more barren situations. May some of the odium which has attached and justly to the sin of the false disciple, be bestowed upon the sin itself, wherever it develops itself; and may every one tear up, with resoluteness, every undue attachment to this world which he may discover lurking in his heart, for a fearful beacon has fallen, and lies mangled in the path of the covetous.

VI. NO MEANS OF GRACE WILL, OF THEMSELVES, CONVERT THE SOUL.

What a striking instance of their inefficiency

does the history of this unhappy man afford! He was taken into intimate fellowship with the Redeemer. He travelled with him through the villages of Israel during all his public ministry. He saw nearly all the miracles which he wrought. He heard all his disputes with the Jewish rulers, and all his instructions to the thronging multitudes; and, when they departed at night, he could ask Jesus for any explanation or further instruction he pleased. Never was a man elevated nearer to heaven in privilege than he. He was "one of the twelve;" a rank higher than the highest of the earth. But what did his privileges for his conversion? He was "the son of perdition," and to perdition he has gone. He lived unconverted and he died unconverted. If there be any intrinsic efficiency in means, he would have been renewed and saved, for he enjoyed the best means that God has afforded. But no; all the miracles and example and instructions of the Son of God did not melt his heart.

What immeasurable self-sufficiency is it to think that means only are needed to regenerate the world! That education without the

gospel will elevate man to his highest destiny ! To deny the personal existence and the irresistible agency of the Holy Spirit in the conversion of sinners ! Let those who deify *moral suasion* (unenforced by the Spirit) go and preach to Judas, and see if they can accomplish what the preaching of Christ failed to do ! No. “ Paul may plant and Apollos may water, but God must give the increase.” The most which mere moral suasion in religion can accomplish is to wrap its subjects in a winding-sheet of self-righteousness, and lay them down in a sleep of death. The Holy Spirit must breathe upon the slain, strip them of the bands which hamper them, and make them arouse, or else they will sink to ruin ; and none the less certainly because they go in a path concealed from others.

In conclusion, we are admonished, if we are professed disciples of Christ, not to confide in our outward relations or privileges. Judas was a professor of religion, a preacher of the gospel, but he was a cast-away ; he fell from the communion-table to the lowest hell. His course is traced to its conclusion for our warning. The inspired penman steps aside and

lifts the shroud flung over his despairing visage, that every future disciple may be stirred with fear, and be led to earnest efforts that the bond which unites him to the Saviour be like the vital union of the branch to the vine. We are admonished also, to bear tenderly the failings of others, and tenderly reclaim every wanderer from the beginning of his departures, for we may need the same office of Christian affection. We are not to expect perfection among the saints on earth, and, though the thought may seem foreign, I cannot but utter it, if it was no reproach to Christ or to the rest of his disciples that such a traitor was with them, let it be no reproach to his religion that there are similar ones still. He who expects to find a perfectly pure church on earth must go elsewhere than even to Christ's immediate disciples, to find it.

If the reader be yet a stranger to God, let me ask you to reflect deeply upon the end of the wretched man we have been so long contemplating. He followed a course of sin, covertly, pleasingly to himself, but he was sent to his own place. The world has cautiously glided its arms about *your* heart.

You are insensible of your bondage. The thirty pieces of silver are not your price of blood; but, *for some price*, you have yet evaded the claims of the Saviour. By some allure-ment you are being led along, nearer and nearer the dangerous verge. Awake to the insidious embrace before the world clasp its hold tightly about your spirit, and your heart be left crushed, withered and dead!

“ Can sin’s deceitful way
Conduct to Zion’s hill?
Or those expect with God to reign,
Who disregard his will?

Thy grace, O God, alone
Can a good hope afford!
The pardoned and renewed shall see
The glory of the Lord.”

CHAPTER III.

The Midnight Inquisition.

SCRIPTURE NARRATIVE. Matt. xxvi. 59-68. — Mark xiv. 53-65. — Luke xxii. 54 and 63-71. — John xviii. 12, 14 and 19-24.

THE Jewish hierarchy had Jesus at length in their power ; but so crippled had that power become under their heathen masters, that it amounted to little more than a name. Yet the shadow of their power they meant to cast over their victim in its darkest folds. Their proceedings cannot be characterized better than in the prophetic language of the Psalmist, "They gather themselves together against the righteous, and condemn the innocent blood."* How strikingly do the features of Jewish hate and Roman recklessness peer out in this prophetic delineation ! But before proceeding with the narrative of the trial of our Saviour, there is one fact to be stated, not always clearly enough exhibited, yet an index to the disposition which instigated the trial.

* Psalm xciv. 21.

It is this: *His trial was as illegal in form, as his sentence was unjust in fact.* A statement of the regular form of trial among the Jews, and a comparison of it with their actual proceedings will sufficiently show this.

“The whole criminal procedure of the Pentateuch rested upon three principles, which may be thus expressed: publicity of the trial, entire liberty of defence allowed to the accused, and a guaranty against the dangers of testimony.”*

In accordance with these principles, trials were not allowed to be conducted during the night time. Especially capital cases must be investigated by day, usually in the morning. During any of the national feasts, the Talmud forbade a trial.

On the day of trial, the members of the sanhedrim were seated in a circle, upon cushions, in the present Oriental style, with the accuser and the accused in the centre. A secretary (sometimes two were present, one upon each hand of the president) wrote down every thing relating to the case. The

* This abstract is derived chiefly from M. Dupin's Trial of Jesus.

papers were read and the witnesses successively introduced. Two witnesses, at the least, were necessary to establish a charge. If they swore falsely, they were subjected to the punishment to which they exposed the accused by their testimony. When a man was condemned, they whose evidence established his guilt, inflicted the first blow, to add the last degree of certainty to their honesty. The simple confession of an individual against himself would not decide a condemnation; nor must he be believed unless his confession was established by two or more witnesses. After an examination, the judges who believed the party innocent first gave their reasons, then they who believed him guilty, however with the greatest moderation. When the accused person wished to speak, he was listened to with the most profound attention. The spectators were then all removed and the two scribes collected the votes of the counsel. Eleven votes out of twenty-three were sufficient to acquit; it required thirteen to condemn. In case of acquittal, the defendant was discharged instantly: if he was condemned, the sentence was not pronounced till

the third day. During the intermediate day, the judges must observe the strictest temperance, and could be occupied with nothing but the cause. On the morning of the third day they returned to the judgment-seat. Any of the judges, who had previously condemned might now acquit, but he who had before acquitted could not now condemn.

If a majority still condemned, two magistrates immediately accompanied the condemned person to the place of punishment. The judges, however, did not leave their seats. They placed at the door of the judgment-hall an officer with a small flag in his hand; a second officer followed the prisoner and kept constantly looking back to the former. If any new evidence was announced to the judges favorable to the prisoner, the first officer waived his flag, and the second officer returned with the prisoner. If the prisoner declared to the magistrates who accompanied him, that he recollected any new reasons in his favor, he was brought again before his judges, no less than five times. If no incident occurred, the procession advanced slowly, preceded by a herald who proclaimed in a

loud voice: "This man, [giving his whole name] is led to punishment for such a crime; the witnesses who have sworn against him are such and such persons; if any one has evidence to give in his favor, let him come forth quickly."

At some distance from the place of punishment, they urged him to confess his crime, and made him drink a stupifying beverage to render the approach of death less terrible.

Bearing in mind this course of legal procedure in criminal causes, before the sanhedrim, let us return to the sacred narrative, and see how utterly it was disregarded in the present instance.

As soon as the band sent out by the chief priests had secured their innocent victim, they hastened back into the city, not without giving him on the way a foretaste of the malicious indignities which they afterwards showed themselves so ready to heap upon him. Instead, however, of conducting him directly to the assembly met to try him, they led him first to the house of Annas, or Anan^{is}, formerly a high priest, and father-in-law to the present incumbent. Why this act of injustice should

be perpetrated, we do not know; though, probably, they wished to show their prey to Annas, whom perhaps age or some duty kept from meeting with the sanhedrim, and to get his sanction to their proceedings. This aged man, already near the judgment-seat of Him who is brought before him, connived at his oppression; and, after he had sufficiently gratified his curiosity and his triumph over the despised Nazarene, sent him still bound to the palace of his successor, Caiaphas.

Here were assembled a convention of the sanhedrim, impatiently expecting the innocent object of their machinations. Whether it was a regularly notified and full session of that tribunal, is very doubtful. Most probably it was a gathering of the party, embracing nearly all, however, opposed to Christ, who were met, in their eager haste, to perform every thing necessary to his condemnation, preparatory to a formal sentence, which they passed early in the morning.

They were assembled in the interior of the quadrangle of the high priest's palace. This was an open court, on ~~the~~^{the} sides of which were the rooms of the palace, and on the fourth

three

was the porch, or waiting-room, through which access was had to the street. This arrangement would leave an open space in the middle, which was called the court, the present session-place. The court was usually paved with marble, with no covering but an awning stretched across from side to side, to shield the area from the perpendicular rays of a torrid sun. The floor of the end opposite to the door of entrance, was elevated by a platform above the rest of the pavement; so that they who sat upon it could overlook those who stood below.

Here were the chief priests gathered. It is about time for their emissaries to return, whom they had sent to arrest Jesus. The chill dampness of the midnight air settles down upon them, but their excited passions and impatience keep them warm. They are pacing the court floor in anxiety, and sharpening each other to their work. At length, a shuffling and tramping of feet is heard in the street. The noise approaches. It echoes in the porch of the house a moment, and then the inner door opens, and the ruffian band enter, with the Son of Man bound, in their midst.

A gleam of satisfaction runs round the court, as the throng fall back near to the door, and leave Jesus standing before them. They know that they at last have him in their power, and it shall be through their own fault if he escape them. His blood alone will quench their enmity, and they proceed to put their preconcerted plans in operation.

A little imagination can place the whole scene before us. At the further end, upon the elevated platform, sits the conclave of priests, with dark passionate animosity beaming in their faces, in striking contrast with the subdued, patient resignation of the Redeemer, standing in their midst. At the lower end of the court, stands the group of soldiers and servants, watching the progress of the trial, their sallow features alternately revealed and hidden by the dusky light of the burning coals, which they ^{have} ~~had~~ kindled to warm themselves. Among them Peter for a while appears; but his part in the present transaction is deferred till the next chapter. At a little distance from this group, and near to the platform, stands "the beloved disciple," anxiously and sorrowfully watching the movements upon the stage.

Over the whole, the slant rays of the western moon cast a mellowing light through the ornamental railing above, which surrounds the sides of the court. Here the Saviour is to spend his last night in the flesh. Here he is to endure the mockery of a trial.

The object of his judges evidently is, more to find some plausible accusation before the Roman governor, than to satisfy any honest purpose of self-information. The very first words of the chief priest show us what to expect. Caiaphas had already legally disqualified himself to sit in judgment, because he had two days before declared that Jesus must die; and here he further disqualifies himself by turning accuser.

But let us draw near and hear this *inquisition*. The high priest has just asked Jesus of his disciples and his doctrine,* questions which he, as a judge, had no business to ask. The council have nothing to do with the doctrines which he taught; or, with the number, or present rendezvous of his disciples; and if they have, it is illegal to charge the defendant to testify against himself. If they wished for

* John xviii. 19

information upon these points, they ought to summon his followers as witnesses. Christ, therefore, exposes firmly, and with dignity, their injustice. "I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret have I said nothing."*

It was a right allowed to the meanest culprit brought before this tribunal, that he should say nothing to criminate himself; but when Christ insists upon this plain and acknowledged right,—“Answerest thou the high priest so?” says one of the petty officers of the court standing near; and he smites him upon the face with the open palm of his hand. The blow was a most insulting outrage; the answer of Jesus was respectful, calm and just; he simply stated his right to be tried by witnesses, and not to criminate himself. And he nobly answers to this cowardly insult of the high priest’s underling. “If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why smitest thou me?”

The chief priests had been too often baffled in their attempts to entrap Jesus in his talk,

* John xviii. 20, and onwards.

and being painfully reminded of these defeats by what has already transpired, they desist from their present course and strike into another. It is a tacit confession that, after all, they have nothing to urge against their victim but their complete hatred. To accomplish its gratification no resort is too mean for them. If truth will not serve their turn, falsehood shall be tried.

Accordingly, they appear to yield to Jesus' demand for witnesses of his doctrine, and the whole company, "the chief priests and all the council," quit their capacity as judges, and descend to the place of accusers, thus virtually excluding themselves entirely from the right of passing sentence now or hereafter. "Then the chief priests and all the council sought for witness against Jesus to put him to death; and found none. For many bare false witness against him, but their witness agreed not together." * Among those congregated around the fire at the lower end of the hall, are some who have heard Jesus teach in Jerusalem, or heard of his teaching, but with the most diligent racking of their memories

* Mark xiv. 55, 56.

they can recollect nothing on which the court can fasten even a plausible pretext for the full sanhedrim to pass a sentence of condemnation. Neither do they agree in what they do remember. So the priests are in as bad a dilemma as before.

But at last appears a prospect of relief. Two suborned wretches, tools of some of the council, are found, who can testify to nearly the same thing. One of them says, "We heard him say, I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands:"* says the other, "This fellow said, I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days."† But their testimony, besides being discrepant, was false in fact. Christ had never made this assertion. He had said indeed, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up;" but John adds, "He spake of the temple of his body."‡ He did not say he could or he would destroy their house of worship at Jerusalem; nothing like it; but that, if the Jews put him to death

* Mark xiv. 58. † Matt. xxvi. 61. ‡ John ii. 18-21.

he should return to life again within three days.

The council feel that this testimony is insufficient for the purposes of conviction. For though his enemies in the sanhedrim are in an overwhelming majority, yet there are two or three of his friends, (if they were present at this illegal party meeting, which may be doubted,) who may make their outrageous injustice uncomfortable to his judges, if they shall thus bid defiance to every principle of law and justice. They must resort to another artifice. All they want is a superficial appearance of legality. Strange that these dignitaries of the Jewish church cannot see the self-condemning contrast between their own dispositions and that manifested by the meek object of their brutal persecution. But he must stand at this unjust bar, that his children might be acquitted at a just one.

But their next measure. "Then the high priest stood up in the midst, and asked Jesus, saying, Answerest thou nothing? what is it which these witness against thee? But he held his peace, and answered nothing."* He

* Mark xiv. 60, 61.

saw that words would avail nothing; and they were needless, for the contradiction of the witnesses was of itself a sufficient refutation. The rage and mortification of the council now become unbounded. They have thus far been foiled in every attempt to fasten a plausible proof of crime upon the Redeemer. They must extract something from his own mouth, for the witness of others has failed. But how can this be done? He has already once foiled their art, in their first interrogatory; but however wrong it may be to make a prisoner criminate himself, the accomplishment of their purposes demands some successful measure. The quickened ingenuity of Caiaphas suggests a stratagem to entrap him.

With a solemn air, but with illy-disguised chagrin, he rises and puts Jesus upon oath to testify against himself; a most outrageous violation of justice, to thrust an accused person between the temptation to perjury and the danger of self-inculpation! "I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ the Son of God."*

* Matt. xxvi. 63.

This inquiry was proposed with all the art and malice of a fiend. That Jesus claimed to be the Christ, the Messiah, and yet came in such an humble garb, and to establish, not a temporal kingdom, but one of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost, was the reason of the Jews' hatred and rejection of him. That he,—a despised Nazarene, a poor wanderer, a companion of publicans and sinners; with a meagre retinue of fishermen and taxgatherers; and besides, the open and firm opposer of their self-righteous morality and legendary observances;—that he should be the Messiah, the burden of the prophecies, the promised Seed of Abraham, under whom they expected to be exalted to an unprecedented pitch of greatness, the Prince of peace; nay, that he should be the God of the whole earth, the mighty God, the everlasting Father,—this was what they were determined not to believe. Their extravagant anticipations of national elevation should not so come down. With their exalted views of the character of the Messiah, his humble advent in the flesh was a stumbling-block and an offence.

Whenever Christ claimed to be the Son of

God, the Jews understood him to claim equality with God. So the phrase signified. And more than once did they take up stones to stone him for blasphemy, because he, a man, by the use of this expression, made himself God.* Hence Caiaphas' question meant, whether Christ asserted this equality, as the Messiah, the Son of God. And for this claim, *which he himself admitted*, was he condemned and crucified. This is a fact which should not be forgotten in the present examination. Hence, was the subtlety of the present adjuration of the high priest. If Christ answered, that he was the Son of God, they would accuse him of blasphemy, rejecting the proofs by which he substantiated his claim to divinity: if he was silent, they would condemn him for an impostor. Whichever course he adopted, condemnation was rendered certain. Of course, in such an alternative, there was but one choice for the upright Son of God: to assert his true character as divine. He answered, "Thou hast said," — "I am;" and he gives promise of future proof; "Hereafter shall ye see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds

* See John x. 22, to the end.

of heaven.”* What infinite sagacity in this answer! How does the truth of his claim flash out from the depths of its wisdom! He refers them not to what he had done, for proof; he points them forward to his judgment-seat, where *he* should be the judge, and they the accused. Then would they be glad to embrace him, to escape from his strict equity. And what keenness of remorse harrowed the souls of his infuriated judges, when they went to the bar of God, and found Jesus exalted there! But such are not now their reflections, when the Son of Man is standing bound before them.

At this answer of Jesus, the high priest rends his pontifical robe with counterfeited horror, and exclaims, “He hath spoken blasphemy; what farther need have we of witnesses; behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy.”† Instead of collecting the opinions of the council, as was the law, beginning at the youngest and giving his own opinion last, he reverses the order. He first himself declares the guilt of Jesus, and then appeals to them to support his opinion.

* Matt. xxvi. 64.

† Matt. xxvi. 65.

What pen but that of inspiration could so lay open the secrets of the heart, as is done in this transaction? What description could be more graphic than this? See the high priest, the type of the great "Apostle and High Priest of our profession," his breast heaving with fiend-like hate, and his eyes glistening with rage and exultation that his victim has finally committed himself! See him, rising from his seat and tearing his official robe, which was forbidden to be done,* with a feigned horror at what inwardly swells his heart with savage delight! Can any feelings less than such hypocrisy instigate to the outrages of the present scene! The high priest's expressive decision meets a ready assent from the rest of the council. The sentence unanimously passes round, "He is worthy of death."

At this stage of the proceedings, the group around the fire had drawn near to the platform. They catch by sympathy the passions burning in the breasts of their masters, and long to give the Redeemer a specimen of their disposition towards him. It is already

* Leviticus xxi. 10.

past three o'clock, for the cock had crowed, which marked the beginning of the fourth watch of the night, and whose note had awakened the slumbering conscience of Peter.

As the faction of the priests and rulers have gathered what they think will constitute a plausible ground of condemnation in a full meeting of the sanhedrim, they deliver over Jesus into the hands of the guard that arrested him and the spectators, while they take an hour's repose before the assembling of the whole council in the morning. Instead of guarding him in peace, and allowing him a brief rest, which his long and fatiguing examination so strongly demanded, they yield him up to the care — shall I call it? — of their rough menials: and if the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel, behold what their cruelties are!

The imagination shrinks from the attempt of conceiving and detailing the scene which now ensues. Remember what Jesus had endured up to this moment; remember the necessary bodily fatigue of the preceding day; remember the sorrow that weighed down his spirits at the passover supper the

evening before ; his dejection of soul, as he met his little feeble band there for the last time, and enjoyed his last earthly interview with them ; remember with what mournfulness, as the Son of Man, he saw one of them who had followed him, and had always shared his instructions, slip away, and, for a paltry sum of money, betray him to this ignominy. Remember the intense agony which a few hours ago had prostrated him in the garden of Gethsemane,—an agony beyond what any mortal can conceive ; consider how much all this must have naturally exhausted his strength. And then remember, that immediately afterwards he had been siezed, bound and dragged, in no tender manner, from communion with his disciples, and with his Father, to the house of Annas, his heart sympathizing with his affrighted disciples, scattered without their Master. Remember too, that he had thence been driven to the present place, and here had been made to stand three hours or more, in the cold of the midnight air, after his exhausting perspiration, the object of hatred and oppression and injustice, doubly painful to his pure and holy spirit ; and had, in addition to

his personal sufferings, seen his self-confident Peter at the door, cursing and swearing that he had no knowledge of his abused Master. Add to all this, his perfect knowledge that these sufferings were but the beginning of the sorrows of the day before him, when not man only, but the fury of Satan should be let loose upon him, and the presence of his Father withdrawn in the moment of his "travail of soul." Pour all these floods of distress into one ocean of suffering, and you have a shoreless depth of sorrow which cannot be measured by finite powers; a depth to which apparently not another drop can be added.

Not another drop? Hark! hear you that shout in the inner court? Has Jesus escaped; or has he prostrated his enemies by one exertion of his Almighty arm? Or has he found solace among the servants who could not obtain it from their masters? Again! 'Tis not the noise of distress! 'Tis not the pleased cry of delight! 'Tis the sound of merriment—the quick tones of loud, excited laughter! A tumult as if hell had broken loose and were holding carnival! Let us hasten into the area. What a sight! Look at Jesus, the only-

begotten Son of God, the meek Redeemer, whose hands dropped only blessings, and whose tongue ever spake only comfort to the distressed, from whom no applicant ever went away unblessed ; see him — can you believe it ? — blind-folded in the midst of the rabble throng ! They dance around him, spit upon him, box him upon the ears and cheeks with their rough palms and staves, and with jeers and scoffs, cry out, “ Prophecy who smote thee ! ” There He stands, silent, unruffled, under the keenest insults which can be cast upon an Oriental ; patient as a lamb in the hands of its murderers ! As we turn away from the painful sight, can we be unmoved with His love who endured such rejection of sinners for our redemption ? Can we harden our hearts to his tender invitation, still ringing in our ears, “ Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest ? ” Reader, can you ?

“ Jesus, — full of truth and love,
 We thy kindest call obey ;
 Faithful let thy mercies prove ;
 Take our load of guilt away :
 Weary of this war within,
 Weary of this endless strife,
 Weary of ourselves and sin,
 Weary of a wretched life.”

CHAPTER IV.

The Denial.

SCRIPTURE NARRATIVE. Matt. xxvi. 31-35; lviii. 69-75.—
Mark xiv. 26-31; liv. 66-72.— Luke xxii. 31-34, 54-62.—
John xiii. 36-38; xviii. 15-18, 25-27.

DURING the scenes which have been described in the preceding chapter, occurred an incident, there just alluded to, which, as it attracted the notice of Jesus, must not escape ours. During the brief adjournment of the chief priests, let us return again for a few moments to the events of the last evening.

The personal admonitions which Christ had repeatedly given to his disciples, showed that he had not only a general knowledge, but a particular prescience of the whole dark tragedy before him. This has been repeatedly remarked. I repeat the truth once more. It is obvious in the present circumstance.

He and his disciples had left their upper chamber, and were now wending their way to the mount of Olives. He availed himself of this occasion, to inform them what they

would pass through, as well as himself, that they might recall his words to mind afterwards, and then learn to be cautious of self-confidence. Jesus saith unto them, 'All ye shall be offended of me this night.' Peter, always ardent and running before he is sent, takes it upon himself to doubt the truth of what Christ has asserted. 'Master, thou art mistaken about all being offended because of thee. Perhaps the rest may; but not I.' 'Verily,' says the Redeemer, with an eye of mild rebuke upon the forward, self-confident disciple; 'it is truth, and I say unto thee, the most self-conceited of the whole, that this day, even in this night, before the cock crow twice, — before daylight, — thou shalt *deny* me, not once, nor twice, but thrice.' 'No,' he exclaims with vehemence, 'think not so meanly of me. If I should die with thee, I will not deny thee in anywise. Martyrdom before such base desertion.' And so said they all. With their sympathies so deeply moved, and their fidelity so directly denied, no doubt they felt and thought as they spoke; but we have seen how little they knew themselves, and how much too high they placed

their estimate of their moral courage. At the first approach of danger they all took to their heels with the utmost trepidation. Peter indeed stopped a moment, and made one ill-timed effort at rescue — impulse of instinct more than of courage — but he soon hastened after his fleeing companions.

Whither they fled, where they spent that wearisome night, and whether they knew of the oppression and ignominy to which their Lord was subjected, we are not informed. The sacred penmen have left them concealed in the olive shades of the garden whither they hastened for safety. Two of the disciples however, Peter and John, are again brought into notice. Their interest in knowing what is to become of their Master, soon overcomes their fears, and, as they are not pursued, they turn about and follow him, at a safe distance behind, to the palace of the high priest. As John is known to Caiaphas, he proceeds immediately into the court where his associates are assembled, and where Jesus has just been brought in by the party who arrested him. But Peter does not dare yet to enter farther than into the porch or entry ; a small room

which separated the open area, where the council assembled, from the street. Here, the erewhile boastful disciple paused. But his anxiety will not allow him to be an indifferent waiter. He tries to assume the careless air of a mere spectator, but he cannot keep away from the partly opened inner door, and sit down upon the bench which nearly surrounds the room, as an unconcerned stranger would do.

John, who has advanced forward to the platform where Jesus is standing, looks back over the group around the fire, to see what has become of Peter. But no Peter is there. At last he catches a glimpse of his anxious eye at the entrance-door, as though he would come in, but dares not. He steps down from the platform, and, pressing through the mixed company at the lower end of the area, he asks the damsel that keeps the door, to invite Peter into the court. That a female should be employed in this office, was no unusual thing among Oriental nations. Aged women were frequently employed for this purpose, especially in the private apartments of noble families.

The interest to introduce Peter, manifested by John, whom she very probably knew as a follower of Christ, awakened a suspicion in her mind that Peter also must be a disciple; and his anxious, unsettled glances at the circle on the platform, and the mistrustful uneasiness with which he listens to every word dropped around the fire, and which he but awkwardly attempts to conceal under an artificial ado about the cold, confirms her suspicions. But fully to satisfy her natural curiosity, she proposes her conjectures in a question to him as he stands warming himself. "Art thou not also one of this man's disciples?" Little is Peter expecting such a question from such a quarter. He starts convulsively, and with a deprecating glance, equivocatingly denies it. "I know not, neither understand I what thou sayest."

Peter needed not to have betaken himself to this base deception. There is his fellow-disciple, standing close by the council, mournfully sympathizing with his beloved Lord, whom the high priest and many of the rest know to be a follower of Christ; but they do not particularly regard him; and why is he

in any more jeopardy? And why should he recoil so from the unmeaning inquiry of a simple maid, when he may know the certainty of his detection? His very artifice leads to his exposure at last.

His confusion does not escape the observation of those around the fire, but they take little or no notice of him. This might have allayed his fears. But falsehood deprives one of courage. "The wicked flee when none pursueth, but the righteous are bold as a lion." See it exemplified in the conduct of these two disciples.

Peter, apprehensive lest the charge should be repeated in a form less easily evaded, slips away from the fire, back again into the porch or entry where he first stood, hoping here to escape notice. His anxiety for his Master — for he was indeed a true disciple, though in so doubtful a position — will not allow him wholly to leave the scene of his trial; and his timid apprehensions for his own safety prevent him from courageously owning his relation to Christ, and from coming forward by the side of John. Between the two conflicting feelings, he has a sorry time of it.

He found it was not safe for him to remain in the court. He hopes he may here, in the outer room, witness the trial undisturbed, favored by the partial darkness. But in this he is disappointed. The disciple of Christ cannot remain hidden. He stands here but a little while before he hears the same charge repeated to the few bystanders, of his being a follower of Jesus. According to Matthew and Mark, this charge is repeated by "another maid." Luke represents the person as a "man." This discrepancy is only apparent. The former evangelists declare, that the maid told those that stood by that Peter was one of them; the latter says that the man addressed Peter himself. The truth seems to be this. One of the servant-maids, passing into the porch, catches a view of the timid disciple, on tiptoe to see what is going on within, and, pointing the attention of those present, to him, remarks to them, in a tone loud enough for him to hear, "There stands one of his disciples." One of those men whom she addressed, straitway charges it upon the disconcerted follower,—"Thou art also of them." To him Peter replies, "Man,

I am not." Matthew and Mark do not say to whom he addresses his reply. The apparent contradiction shows the honesty of the sacred narrators.

"He denies with an oath." At first, he prevaricated and plead ignorance; but now, as he sees his true relation to Christ is becoming more widely suspected, he becomes more positive, and seals his guilt with profanity.

It is now nearly two o'clock. The cock had crowed the first time, which marked the hour of midnight, when he first came into the porch.* The unhappy disciple was driven from the fire by the suspicious question of the female door-keeper, and he retreated into the porch to escape her inquisitive curiosity; but here he finds his discipleship a matter of direct assertion. 'T is strange that he does not notice the fulfilment of Christ's words; but Satan is sifting him as wheat of his self-confidence, and he will not empty him out of his fan till the trial is completed.

As all in the porch have been told that he is one of the followers of the victim at the bar,

* Mark xiv. 68.

and as his assertions to the contrary seem not to have removed their impressions, he feels there is little security from a more dreaded notice for him here, and he retraces his steps again to the fire. For a while he escapes further molestation.

In the meantime, the trial has progressed. The false witnesses are on the stand, and all their attention is directed to their testimony. About an hour* elapses in this manner. The confidence of Peter ~~varies~~ rises as his fears descend. To allay suspicions which may have been excited in the minds of those about him, he enters into their conversation with assumed freedom, and comments upon the varied and contradictory evidence of the witnesses. It was always a difficult task for this disciple to bridle his tongue; and, in the present case, it leads him into the very difficulty he is so anxiously trying to shun. For, as generally happens, he overacts his feigned part, and by his loquacity attracts the notice of his companions. "It is one of them," they exclaim; they cannot be mistaken. His previous denial had satisfied them, for then they cared little

* Luke xxii. 59.

who he was; but his peculiar behavior since, offends them, and his cloak of concealment is so loosely put on, that the servants turn upon him in a body and charge it directly home upon him, — “Surely thou art a Galilean, for thy speech betrayeth thee.” What can he say to this? He has been talking freely to allay their surmises, and his very pronunciation has all the while been contradicting his words, and defeating his intentions.

The language of Galilee, though radically the same as that of Jerusalem, abounded in provincialisms and foreign expressions, borrowed from their Syrian neighbors; especially some of the letters were sounded entirely different in the two regions, so that an inhabitant of one could not without difficulty understand the conversation of the other.* Moreover, the citizens of Jerusalem prided themselves upon speaking “the holy tongue,” in its purity, and contemned, as vulgar, the language of the northern province.

* A Galilean, for example, in speaking *immar*, a lamb, so confounded the letters, that a Jew would not know whether he meant an ass, wool, wine, or a lamb.

And by this uncouth, ill-esteemed pronunciation, Peter has all the while been betraying himself. And to complete his confusion and crown his exposure, one of Malchus' relations, the servant whose ear he had cut off, most significantly asks him, "Did I not see thee in the garden with him?" He now became the general object of attention. Maids, servants, and soldiers gather around him. His own language has betrayed him, and one stands before him who has seen him with Christ—a relative of the very man whom, of all others, he has the most occasion to fear. What shall he do in the unhappy dilemma? He has gone too far to retract, for he has already—twice, certainly, if not three times—denied his being a disciple of Jesus. He must either brave out these accumulated proofs, or else acknowledge himself a despised Nazarene, and a cowardly dissembler besides. Fear and pride keep him from the latter and the right course, and so, in desperation, he begins to curse and to swear that he knows not the man, as if this would strengthen his affirmations.

We have a right to suspect his honesty and

veracity who backs up his assertions with profane oaths ; for, in the quaint language of Henry, "None but the devil's sayings need the devil's proofs." The profane swearer shows that he does not expect to be believed upon his simple word. He labels himself "faithless." But it is a vice, a sin, that is happily retreating to the low standing-pools of society ; to rum bar-rooms, and stables and dockyards ; and had Peter kept away from the company of the hangers-on of the palace, he would not have added to his Galilean dialect the language of the rabble about him.

By this last step he has degraded himself as low as Christ will have him descend. While he is thus venting his wicked language, the clear sound of a crowing cock strikes upon his ear. A confused sense of his guilt swims before him. But there is another one who hears the signal ;—the rejected Master upon the stand, hears it. And he hears all which he so impiously says. Nay, he had been with him, in his omniscient spirit, by the fire of coals and in the porch, and he had felt deep pity for his weak, misguided follower. At the sound, the Lord, from his elevated

position, looks down upon the group around Peter. He catches a glance from his flushed eye and such an expressive look as he gives him in return! *—it summons every smothered feeling and recollection in Peter's heart. The whole past rushes across his mind with the velocity of light,—their long years of intimacy—the rich blessings he had received from his Lord—the deep love he had felt and often professed to him as his Saviour—his recent strong protestation of fidelity even unto death,—and now his unprovoked and repeated utter denial of all knowledge of him,—O, it is too much! His brain whirls, his heart beats to bursting, hell seems to open beneath his feet, and pour up its fiends in the disguise of soldiers and servants; and above its lurid flames, beams that mild, mournful, reproving eye, gazing so piercingly upon him! He cannot endure it; he rushes from the midst of the harrowing associations out into the gathering darkness of the setting moon, and, gliding into the first lonely place, with all his tenderest emotions thrilling within him, he drops down and weeps bitterly. His is “a

* Luke xxii. 61,

godly sorrow that needeth not to be repented of." Here is the diametrical difference between his feelings and those of Judas.

And as in the former case, so now, we ought to pause, and contemplate the causes and instructions of this melancholy defection. What, then, were the immediate influences and motives which operated upon this disciple, thus to prostrate him in sin? And how far may his career be for admonition to saints of these later times? Let these two inquiries occupy a brief attention.

One influence is mentioned in the sacred narrative which is not made so apparent in the preceding sketch. Our Lord warned his disciple of it when he foretold his denial of him. "And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat."* However he may have employed his agency in arranging and conducting this trial of Peter's faith, which is an ~~agency~~ ^{agency} I cannot now attempt to explain, we are compelled to believe, from the Saviour's warning, that to this agency we are to refer the severe test of his attachment

agency, * Luke xxii. 31.

to his Lord. Peter, in preference to the rest of the disciples, was selected because the natural traits of his character especially needed this caustic discipline. He was constitutionally forward, a little authoritative and particularly self-confident; qualities which would injure his usefulness, as a pioneer of the gospel, by bringing him into frequent collision with friends and enemies. God allowed Satan, unwittingly on his part, to sift out of Peter these injurious qualities, and teach him his own weakness in a lesson which he would never forget. And how successfully he conveyed the instruction, the result showed. Peter was certainly humbled in his self-esteem, and forwardness, and we see by all his subsequent conduct, that, though his constitutional ardor remained, it was most beautifully softened by an humble attachment to the Redeemer, and by a tender sympathy with the persecuted and tempted followers of Christ. The benefit of his sad experience is seen in the charitable spirit which breathes throughout his catholic epistles, especially the first. Without this humbling though salutary experience, how could he have so interwoven the

electing love and upholding grace of God into the supports of the believer, as he has done in the first chapter of his first epistle? And how else could he have so effectually set forth the danger of disregarding temptations and trials, and the duty of resisting the devil, as he has done in the other chapters of the same epistle? He stood among the churches which grew up under his labors, like a veteran pilot who had been tost in the severest gales, and had grazed upon the most dangerous rocks; and who could, with a bitter remembrance, trace the only safe and sure channel for those who were just launching upon the troublous sea of the primitive times.

Again: the immediate circumstances in which he was placed, were well adapted, without grace, to induce his downfall. These conspiring with his ardent temperament, nothing was more natural than that he should yield to them. They should be weighed, that we may not charge Peter too severely. What, then, were these circumstances? His sympathy was deeply moved in behalf of his persecuted Master, and he could not suppress the desire to be near him in his emergency; not

indeed to deliver him, though he at first attempted it, but now he was drawn partly by that innate principle, whatever we may term it, which always gathers a group around the unfortunate. But this was not all. He had a genuine attachment to Christ. The bonds of saving faith united him to his Lord. He was a true disciple.

But there was another feeling, for the time, dominant in his heart, which quenched the exercise of grace, and led him so far into the wiles of the devil; namely, *personal apprehension*. From the previous remarks of the Saviour, and from the proceedings thus far, he had every reason to suppose that nothing less than death was meditated against his Lord. How far himself and his fellow-disciples were exposed to the same fate, he could not tell. Their prospects were dark. They had been with Christ, had been sent out by him, and had proclaimed the truths, which had so provoked their rulers, himself one of the foremost; and if the rulers meant to nip this new religion in the bud, as seemed their intention, they had every thing to fear. Peter had an additional reason to tremble for him-

self in particular ; he had assaulted one of the high priest's servants, and though the flesh-wound was healed, he might well think that the affront was remembered, and still rankled in Malchus' heart. When he found himself, as he entered the court, among the very ones who had witnessed his attack, he saw he was in their power to bring him to death, without false witnesses, for his resistance to the high priest's band, it might be, acting under a warrant of the sanhedrim. The tempter gave a vividness to his apprehensions from this quarter ; and when the question of his being a disciple was so suddenly proposed to him before this very group, his personal fear immediately denied the fact. His fall is indeed one of the most melancholy cases of backsliding upon record, but there is nothing unnatural in it ; nothing which argues Peter to have been an unconverted man or an apostate ; nothing which separates him from his imitators in this sin of denying Christ from personal apprehensions.

These circumstances do not palliate his guilt, and I am sure that Peter would not have it palliated. His own deep grief showed

how he viewed it; and if we may believe tradition, he preserved the remembrance of it to his latest moments. It is said that he could never after hear the crowing of a cock without having the sound fill his eyes with tears. When his wife was on her way to a martyr's death, his farewell salutation was, "remember the Lord:" and when he was called to endure the same test of fidelity, for his base denial of his Saviour, he felt himself unworthy to occupy the same position as his Master did upon the cross, and at his own earnest entreaty, he characteristically suffered with his head downwards.

I have said, there was nothing in the fall of Peter which separates him from his imitators. While we measure ^{im} ~~impatiently~~ the depth to which he plunged, and while we shrink from looking down that dizzy steep, we should not cease to inquire, Have I not been guilty of a similar sin? To answer the inquiry and to show the foundation of the previous remark, I ask what was Peter's sin? In what did it essentially consist? *In preferring apparent personal safety to a frank acknowledgment of attachment to Christ.* And is Peter the

x imperfectly

only one who has ever done this? Does he stand alone, the only one who has withheld the confession of being a follower of Jesus, when that confession has been connected with trouble or danger? Has no one ever tried to conceal the fact that he was a professed follower of Christ? Has no such one ever been thrown into circles where he has assumed the appearance of the people of the world, lest, if he were faithful to his holy vows, his speech should betray him to be a follower of the Galilean? Has no one ever shrunk from defending the honor of the gospel, when it has been thrust at, lest he should receive an attack? Has no one ever been unwilling firmly to obey the will of God, lest others should deem him bigoted and superstitious? Has no one ever swerved from his honest convictions of duty to God or man from a regard to the opinions or prejudices of others? We cannot lay our hand upon our heart and assert it. You may say that these are not the sins of Peter. But they are from the same spirit; and he who relaxes the demands of consistent piety for fear of being esteemed too precise, would, by an extension of the same

principle, deny his Lord under the circumstances which assailed Peter. Hast thou yielded to a slight temptation, shall not stronger blasts turn thee yet more aside? 'If thou hast run with footmen and they have wearied thee, how wilt thou contend with horses? and if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, how wilt thou do in the swellings of Jordan?' 'O, disciple, lay hold on that mighty grace which is made perfect in thy weakness! cling close to that Advocate, who prayed for his yielding follower, that his faith might not utterly fail, that his prevalent intercessions may be ever enlisted in thy behalf!

“ Ashamed of Jesus! — that dear friend
On whom my hopes of heaven depend?
No! when I blush, be *this* my shame,
That I no more revere his name.”

CHAPTER V.

The Morning Trial.

SCRIPTURE NARRATIVE. Matt. xxvii. 1-2 and 11-30. — Mark xv. 1-19 — Luke xxii. 66-77; xxiii. 1-24. — John xviii. 28-40; xix. 1-16.

“OF a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy council determined before to be done.”* Thus prayed the company of disciples, after the release of Peter and John, by the sanhedrim. They prayed, not that they might escape persecution, but that they might “with all boldness speak the word.” Their argument is drawn from the fact that God foreordained the bitter opposition which had thus far attended the introduction of the gospel; a fact most important to be remembered as we further follow the Son of Man in his closing scenes of sorrow. Take away the predetermining pur-

* Acts iv. 27, 28.

pose of God, and these scenes become confused, as the last fading visions of night. Without it, we cannot understand why "the holy One and just," should be exposed to all this injustice and rage, when he could, by a word, have summoned twelve legions of angels to his assistance, or, by a single volition, have turned the hearts of his enemies, or have held them powerless in his hand. But admit the fact, that all this unparalleled exhibition of malice is but in accordance with the Divine purposes, and that Christ came voluntarily, to fulfil the will of God, by enduring this contemptuous treatment and death, and then do the last twenty-four hours of the life of Jesus become radiant with light. We must bear this as a precious truth in our minds, not for a moment to be forgotten, in tracing to its conclusion our Redeemer's pilgrimage in the flesh, that all through which he passed was "determined before," and was a part of his vicarious sufferings.

In the events of the present chapter, Jews and Gentiles, both rulers and people, directed their mutual hostilities against the Son of God. Thus the whole race of sinners are represent-

ed at his trial and condemnation, and through their delegates display their enmity to the “express image of the Father’s person.” The most opposing interests are united in a superior hatred to holiness, and in that union, and in its actings, we have an actual, undisguised exhibition of the temper of the natural heart in its various phases. “Both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel,” are mankind in convention upon the claims of Christ, and their decision, as exhibited in the events now before us, is the proof of Christ’s own words, “We will not have this man to reign over us.”*

We left the Saviour in charge of the hard-hearted servants and idlers, at Caiaphas’ palace, the object of their merciless ridicule and abuse. The high priest’s party had adjourned just before daylight, to snatch a moment’s repose, before a full council of the sanhedrim at the legal time of session. But before following the history of their subsequent proceedings, I must again turn aside to consider *the relation of the Jewish nation to the Roman government*. It shall be as brief as a clear

* Luke xix. 14.

understanding of the part which Pilate was called to act, will allow.

It is needless to trace the intrigues and factions among the priests and rulers, by which the Jews lost their independence. Jerusalem was finally taken by the Roman general Pompey, in the sixty-third year before Christ, on the very fast day, held in commemoration of the conquest of the city by Nebuchadnezzar. Until the death of Herod the Great, the Jews had enjoyed a king, and had paid tribute directly to the Roman empire. On account of the oppressions of his son Archelaus, Judea was deprived of this shadow of power, and, twelve years before Christ, was united to Syria; thus becoming a Roman province. By this alteration of their form of government, their highest civil officer was only a procurator or vice-president, accountable to the Syrian governor. Usually the procurators had only the power to collect revenues, and try revenue cases; but, as a mark of favor, the procurator of Judea, was entrusted with the trial of capital offences, and the execution of criminals.

The Jews were not deprived of their reli-

gion. They were left in the enjoyment of their ceremonial laws ; their Mosaic worship, and most of their civil privileges. But they were deprived of the power of touching the life of a citizen. Not only had they lost the power of executing criminals, but also of sentencing them to death. The procurator was not the mere executive of the sentences of the sanhedrim. He was the judicial power. The Jewish tribunal could not legally condemn a man to death, and oblige the procurator to execute him. Their highest tribunal, the sanhedrim, could only appear as plaintiffs at Pilate's judgment-hall, and accuse a Jewish criminal. All their previous votes and sentences, however unanimous, availed nothing, unless the Roman officer approved them. In this sense, we are to understand their assertion, "It is not lawful for us to put any man to death."* They could not execute him, nor condemn him. In literal verity had the prediction been fulfilled upon them, at the coming of Shiloh. "The sceptre had departed from Judah, and a lawgiver from between his feet."† That such was the re-

* John xviii. 31.

† Gen. xlix, 10.

lation of the Jewish national polity, will be seen in the trial of Jesus before Pilate.

The sun, which at this season of the year, rose at five o'clock, was just gilding the summits of "the mountains round about Jerusalem;" and the sleepers, with whom the city was now full, were awaking to pay their morning sacrifice at the temple. The members of the sanhedrim were already hastening along the yet still streets, in little companies, towards the palace of Caiaphas. "They devise iniquity, and work evil upon their beds, and when the morning is light, they practice it."* A full meeting of the council is to be convened here, to carry into operation the plans which had been matured the past night.

When they are seated, Jesus, wan and weary, is again placed in their midst, and the same question respecting his character, is again proposed to him, on which they had before condemned him, that the whole council might be witness to his words. Jesus sees perfectly through their intentions, and replies, "If I tell you, ye will not believe; and if I

* Micah ii. 1.

also ask you, ye will not answer me, nor let me go." * There is no honesty in their inquiries, nor disposition to do him justice, and he tells them so. Die he must; that they have resolved upon. All they now want is a satisfaction to the scruples of some of their members, and a pretence on which to accuse him to Pilate. For this reason, they repeat the inquiry, although he has just referred to the proof from his exaltation. "Art thou then the Son of God?" He mildly assents. "Ye say that I am." Their purpose is gained, and they close the examination. "What need we any further witness? For we ourselves have heard of his own mouth." Jesus having thus far remained firm, in his claim to the Messiahship, they feel confident that he will not now recant. A hasty vote is taken upon the fact of his claim; and the whole assembly rise, rebind Jesus, and hurry him to the judgment-hall of the Roman procurator, Pontius Pilate.

The irregularities, and acts of violence which have hitherto been perpetrated upon the Son of Man, are but an imperfect speci-

* Luke xxii. 67, to the end.

men of the scenes upon which we now enter. The exhibitions of character are so multiplied, and the circumstances so complex, as to forbid more than a faint and fragmentary conception of them.

The sanhedrim, let it be remembered, founded their decision *among themselves*, upon the blasphemy of Jesus' claim to be the Son of God. Behold their duplicity before Pilate. "It was early," says the sacred narrative, when they reached the Roman officer's residence. Their bloody haste, could brook no delay; not even from regarding the forms of common etiquette!

The Roman procurators resided at Cæsa-rea; but at the times of the great festivals of the nation, as then, vast crowds of people were assembled at the temple, they removed their court to the Jewish capitol, to suppress the tumults and seditions, that very frequently arose among such a restive multitude. Hence Pilate was now present in the city. His head-quarters were in the upper, or north part of the city, near to the temple, in a magnificent edifice, which had been Herod's palace in his lifetime, but which was now occu-

ried by the Roman governors, whenever they staid in Jerusalem.

Hither then, they hie with their prisoner, at an early hour, urged by their impetuous hatred, and by their fear of a rescue, if they wait till the streets shall be filled. Pilate is within his house, ignorant of what has been done. But behold the sanctimonious hypocrisy of these priestly dignitaries! They will not step across his threshold, lest they shall be defiled, and thus be disqualified to eat of the feast, which followed the passover supper. Pilate is a Gentile, and therefore they cannot enter his doors! Yet they can send Jesus in, who will be as much contaminated as they! And they can stand in the street three hours, frothing with rage, and the most diabolical rancor, and then feel fitted to join in a feast of thanksgiving to God, provided they do not step inside a Gentile's door! If they shall do this, it will debar them from His acceptance! If not, they will go with their burning passions, and sit down to their banquet, and when they take the cup of blessing, they will "wipe their mouths and say they have done no wickedness!" At such superficial squeamishness, who does not

involuntarily adopt the Saviour's own epithet, "Whited sepulchres, fair without, but within, full of dead men's bones, and all uncleanness!"

But let us leave these precious specimens of formal hypocrisy, and follow the Saviour, — "the holy, harmless, undefiled," — into the audience-room of Pilate. He stands before him, Emanuel, God with us, in the form of a servant, a slave, bound like a malefactor. His countenance is bruised and disfigured by the rude assaults of the high priest's servants. Livid spots mark the blows of their fists. He is weary with watching, and mournful in view of his prospective sufferings, yet such an indescribable calmness and patience sits upon his brow, as ~~he~~^{he} speaks his deep love in this voluntary humiliation. Pilate is not entirely unmoved at his appearance. His conscience and his sympathy are immediately enlisted in the behalf of one whom he considers the victim of the ever-restless uneasiness of the Jews, and he is evidently prepossessed in favor of his acquittal.

As the accusers of Christ do not appear before Pilate, he goes out to them, and asks them, "What accusation bring ye against this

man?"* They reply with characteristic haughtiness, "If he were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered him up unto thee." Now out of your own mouths be ye adjudged of falsehood, ye Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! They know this was not the charge on which they had condemned him; but they must vary their accusations to suit the feelings of Pilate, for he looked contemptuously upon them and their religion. They would have him understand by their reply, that Christ is adjudged guilty under some of their laws which they can appreciate better than himself. '*We* have found him guilty: all we want is your assent to his execution.' Perhaps they think they can stave off inquiry into his guilt. But Pilate's interest in the prisoner will not be so satisfied, and he responds in their own style, "Take ye him, and judge him according to your own law." If you will take the responsibility of his trial, take that of his punishment also. They know they have no power to do this, and so they answer, "It is not lawful for us to put any man to death."

* John xviii. 29-32.

As Pilate insists upon their articles of accusation against Jesus, they begin to accuse him ; saying, “ We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Cæsar, saying, that he himself is Christ, a king.”* To omit the almost contemptible view which they give of the Messiah, calling him “ *a king,*” for whom the nation were anxiously looking, we cannot measure the baseness and mendacity of the charge itself. For, *in the first place,* it was not their real accusation against him. Not a word was lisped about Cæsar at Caiaphas’ house. But they know that the Roman judge cares nothing whether Christ be, or claims to be the Son of God, and a charge of blasphemy ever so heinous and ever so well proved, will excite no interest in him. They must have something in which he will be interested, and so they bring up the frequent charge of Jesus’ exciting the nation against paying tribute ; for this is a case of his special oversight. *Again,* they know that if Christ, as the Messiah, had thus arisen against their hated bondage, they would have hailed him with louder acclama-

* Luke xxiii. 2.

tions than the hozannas of the children. For the Roman taxgatherer was universally execrated from Dan to Beersheba, and there was nothing under which these accusers at Pilate's door were more restive than this very subjection to the Romans. So that they are charging as a capital offence upon Jesus, what they delight to anticipate in their hearts. Once, they had reproached Christ for associating with publicans, as if he were too much inclined to favor the Romans; and now they will have him put to death, because he does not favor them more. Strange their diabolical sycophancy does not strangle them with shame! *Besides*, their charge is as false as crafty. They have not a shadow of evidence to substantiate it, and they present none. On the contrary, Christ had, when once they asked him if it was lawful to give tribute to Cæsar, answered distinctly, "Render unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's; and unto God the things which are God's."* But we are not to expect any truth or candor from the infuriated group in front of the procurator's palace. Like ravening hyenas, the blood

* Matt. xxii. 21.

alone of the innocent Jesus can satisfy them, and that because he has invaded, by his pure teachings, their usurped spiritual domination.

But they have succeeded in arresting the attention of Pilate, by founding their accusations upon opposition to the tribute-money. Accordingly he goes back into the area where he left Jesus standing, and asks him, "Art thou the king of the Jews.?"* This is a new accusation not preferred against Jesus before the sanhedrim, and he desires to know who has originated it. "And Jesus answered him, Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of me?" Pilate replies, "Am I a Jew? Thine own nation and the chief priests have delivered thee unto me. What hast thou done?"—that is, to obtain this title of king. As he can get no satisfactory solution to these urgent proceedings against the prisoner from his accusers, he applies to the accused himself for explanation. The Saviour, knowing the honesty of his inquiry, and seeing his perplexity, for Pilate was fast becoming involved in an undesirable dilemma, answers him frankly. He had asked him if

* John xviii. 33-38.

he were a king. In a certain sense, Christ replies, but "my kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now is my kingdom not from hence." This completely shows the falsity of the priestly charge. Pilate therefore again inquires, "Art thou a king then?" Ideas of temporal power and splendor only, float before the eyes of this subject of imperial Cæsar, at the mention of a kingdom. One single gleam of light however, penetrates the dark mind of this heathen ruler. A flitting conception of some spiritual power glances by, and he asks again, "Art thou a king then?" Jesus confesses it, and defines his meaning. "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Every one that is of the truth, heareth my voice." How important is this moment in the life of the procurator! The Son of God has just opened his lips to explain the nature of his kingdom of holiness and eternal peace. He has proffered its privileges to this earthly dignitary. Stop a moment, Pilate! Listen to the gra-

scious words that proceed out of his mouth, for in them is life forever! It is probably the first and it may be the last time that thou shalt ever hear the gospel! But no! His first query is answered. He sees there is no danger to Cæsar's authority from the vagaries of this harmless man, and with a single interrogatory, "What is truth?" to which he does not wait for an answer, he hurries out to the increasing throng at his door, more than ever convinced that Jesus does not deserve the fate to which his accusers seem determined to bring him. "I find in him no fault at all," says he. Here is the sentence of the Roman judge. *It is a sentence of acquittal.*

Had Pilate been conscientiously just, he would have immediately released Jesus from restraint, and would have protected him from the chagrin of his persecutors. Hitherto he has appeared disposed to make an honest inquiry into the merits of the case, and he has borne commendably the troublesome importunity of the sanhedrim. Had he persevered in as correct a course, immeasurable reproach and grief would have been lifted from his now stricken spirit. But, like too many others, he

was unwilling to expose himself to trouble from these vexing priests, for the sake of justice to one obscure individual, whom he regarded as a patient, inoffensive man, though perhaps a little erratic and visionary.

As soon as Pilate pronounced his sentence of acquittal, he is assailed with loud outcries, muttering denunciations, and angered flashes from passionate eyes. A large mob has collected in the street, around the waiting priests and rulers, and he feels his position to be one of jeopardy. He cannot safely acquit Christ, and his natural sense of justice and his interest in the injured man, standing so patiently bound before him, struggles hard against condemning him. It has become a serious matter with him, and he wishes himself forever away from his constantly turbulent subjects, who are all the time exclaiming in menacing tones, "He stirreth up the people, teaching throughout all Jewry, beginning from Galilee to this place."*

Yes, this is the true difficulty. Men in earnest forget to maintain the assumed part which they can play in cooler moments.

* Luke xxiii. 5.

Under excitement the real character is displayed. See it verified in the charge now laid against Jesus.—“He stirreth up the people, teaching.” Blasphemy is forgotten. Tribute to Cæsar is forgotten. Their real motive peers out from its concealment. He teaches! and the common people hear him gladly, and even some of the rulers are gone after him, and they leave us, the priests; and thus our influence is crippled and our tyranny is exposed and broken, and hence we hate him, and he must be put to death! This popular preacher must be destroyed, lest the people should throw down our heavy burdens from their shoulders! Give credit to the chief priests and Scribes and Pharisees, for now they speak the truth from the abundance of their heart.

But Pilate does not thus philosophize. He hears another sound, one which holds out to him a prospect of relief from his unpleasant position. The word “Galilee” strikes upon his ear. It is out of his province. He has no cognizance of cases there. It is under Herod’s jurisdiction, and he can slip off this troublesome case upon the shoulders of his

brother officer. But to be certain, he inquires if Jesus be a Galilean; and being answered in the affirmative, he sends him and his accusers to Herod, who, fortunately, is in Jerusalem at this time.

As soon as the Redeemer is ushered into the street, accompanied by a guard of soldiers, as much for protection as for safe-keeping, the whole promiscuous throng of priests and Pharisees and idlers, haste in noisy confusion to Herod's residence, in another part of the city. The company receive constant additions from the ever ready materials of a mob, with which the streets on feast days were unusually filled. What were the insults and provocations heaped upon our Redeemer as he is thus, in no gentle manner, conducted from one place to another, let not conjecture attempt to know. He is not tenderly handled, nor soothingly addressed! No follower is near him! No beloved disciple clinging to his side, in whose sympathetic tear his human soul can find comfort! Bloodthirsty enemies are his companions! Bulls of Bashan encompass him!

Herod is glad to see the company approach,

when he learns the name of their prisoner.* He had often heard of Christ when in Galilee. The report of his many miracles had reached his ears, and therefore he welcomed him to his presence. But not with the temper of Pilate. He looks upon him as an insane visionary, and a fit object of sport. He hoped to extract some merriment from him, and even to get him to work some miracle before him. But to all his questions the Saviour is silent. "Though he questioned with him in many words, he answered him nothing."

The Jewish leaders, perceiving the calm, dignified silence of Jesus, and fearful that Herod also will dismiss him uncondemned, become even more vociferous in their accusations than they were at Pilate's tribunal. But to all their clamorous charges, our Redeemer responds not a word. Defence is useless. What can he expect from the unprincipled, and even publicly vicious Herod Antipas? He who has beheaded his forerunner John, because he faithfully reproved him for his scandalous sins, will not scruple to maltreat a greater and holier than he. As

* Luke xxiii. 8-11.

Herod is not a Roman, but an Idumean proselyte, to maintain his adopted relation to the Jews, he joins with them in ridiculing the Messiah. He and his men of war set him at nought; make him the butt of their coarse humor, till they exhaust their ingenuity. When they have amused themselves with outraging the exquisite sensibilities of the holy Jesus, they ~~perpetuate~~ ^{complete} their mockery by adding a public mark of indignity, and a crafty ridicule upon the chief priests themselves. One of his body-guard draws an old cast-off robe of Herod's from its dusty hiding-place, and arrays Jesus in it. In this badge of mock royalty he is sent back to Pilate. This mark of mutual deference between the two governors, though begun by self-interest, was the means of healing an ancient feud between them.

Again the throng are on their way to Pilate's bar. The morning has already been far spent, and nothing is yet accomplished. The priests, irritated by this repeated failure to get a legal order for execution, vent their surcharged chagrin on the innocent Redeemer's head. Behold the heart-rending

spectacle! See the blessed Jesus in the midst of this hooting mob! Him, the King in Zion, the Angel of Jehovah's presence; Him who led Israel through the wilderness, who talked with Moses at the door of the tabernacle:—see Him, dwelling in the flesh, slowly and wearisomely traversing the streets of Jerusalem, clad in a faded, worn-out robe of sallow white, bedizened with tarnished silver, and glittering in the rays of the morning sun! Look in the pale and disfigured face of this man of sorrows, thus made the jibe of the offscouring of the streets, and recognise thy Saviour! Go and stand on the roof of one of the houses as he passes by. Listen to the noise as the crowd come pressing on. See the street-loungers, running from every quarter, ready for sport or insurrection as the occasion may demand. Catch the Babel confusion of their broken exclamations. Fill thy imagination with all this uproar; but especially fix thine eye upon the innocent cause, as he drags his tired and fainting limbs along. But see in all this indignity and insult, in all the deep waves of distress that dash against the soul of thy Saviour, thine own sins as the

instigators. Detect a sin of rejection in the scowling face of every priest. Detect a sin of indifference in the careless air of every Roman soldier. Detect a sin of trifling in every jest and insult that flies from the mouths of the ungodly rabble. Let this crowded street be the living incarnation of thy life, if thou art one of them that reject the gracious calls of this ascended Saviour!

But the ungodly throng have reached the procurator's residence, and we must go on with the narrative. Had Pilate decidedly and firmly carried out the convictions of his own mind upon the first examination, he would have avoided the unhappy dilemma in which he is now involved. But when he began to waver from the right, and to try to induce the Jews to withdraw their persevering accusations, an observer could not have erred in predicting the result.

His progress in injustice and in sin, is now rapid. Yet, with the forlorn energy of the drowning man, he grasps at every expedient which promises to rescue Jesus, and will not expose to danger his own unstable power over this restless people. In this yielding resist-

ance, his conscience and sense of Roman justice struggles to the last; and it is only through the vulnerable point of political ambition that he is finally conquered. The remainder of the trial, if it can receive the term, is but an enumeration of Pilate's repeated devices and attempts, growing weaker and weaker, of rescuing an innocent man from the fangs of his relentless destroyers. But, like one involved in the contracting coils of the boa constrictor, while his efforts become more and more feeble as priestly perseverance casts fold after fold about him, only when inextricably involved he yields, and with opposition traced in the last expression of his rigid countenance.

Such is his first manœuvre, when Jesus is again brought before him. "Ye have brought this man unto me, as one that perverteth the people; and behold, I, having examined him before you, have found no fault in this man, touching those things whereof ye accuse him; no, nor yet Herod; for I sent you unto him; and lo, nothing worthy of death is done unto him: I will therefore chastise him and release

him.”* How well this proposal satisfies the chief priests, the melancholy sequel tells us too well! He reads the rejection of his scheme in their expressive features, and the chastisement is postponed for the present, and another plan is resorted to for conciliating Christ’s merciless enemies, and persuading them to withdraw. This plan Luke proceeds immediately to mention.

It appears from the sacred narrative, that it had been a custom with Pilate, and probably with his predecessors, on the anniversary of the Passover, to pardon a Jewish convict. When or by whom this practice was introduced, nothing certain is known. It had obtained, however, so long that the Jewish people expected it as a matter of course; and they had already begun to demand, on the present occasion, their usual favor.† Probably political reasons first suggested the plan to their Roman masters. With such a restive people, various devices must be adopted, to keep them measurably patient under the yoke. Besides, it would often happen that some favorite of the people would involve

* Luke xxiii. 14-16.

† Mark xv. 8.

himself in the meshes of the Roman law, and be at the mercy of the Roman governor. The fact that they could once a year enter the prison of Cæsar and snatch one victim from death, would go far to conciliate them to bear his rule all the other days of the year.

This politic practice affords Pilate a hope of escape from death for Jesus, and for himself of escape from the danger of a decision against the voice of the Jewish national court. He perceives that envy actuates the chief priests in their measures, and that their charges of sedition are but the shallow coverings to their jealousy of a teacher so popular as the Saviour. And as *the people* themselves have the choosing of the favored person, who, as a body, have yet made no particular manifestation of their disposition towards Christ, he feels relieved by the almost certainty that they will choose his pardon. To bias their decision as much as possible in his favor, he places in the opposite scale the vilest malefactor which the prisons of Jerusalem at this time contained; namely, Barabbas.

This robber's character is sufficiently delineated in the scriptures, though the detail

of his evil deeds is not particularly given. He was “a notable prisoner.”* All Jerusalem knew him, and his exploits of wickedness, and doubtless hated him too, or there would be nothing striking in their choice of his life, to that of Jesus. He had been a ringleader in some seditious movements, and “a robber,” † who had supported his banditti, by plundering travellers to and from Jerusalem. Many such characters infested the country between this city and Jericho. He had, besides, “committed murder in the insurrection ;” ‡ nay, had been so bold as to enter Jerusalem itself, and set at defiance the laws of their common safety. But he was finally arrested, to the great relief and joy of the inhabitants, and now “lay bound with them that made insurrection with him.” ‡

Thought Pilate, ‘It cannot be that the Jewish populace will prefer to Jesus, this pestiferous fellow, all stained as he is, with the three most injurious crimes,—treason, robbery and murder; and ready, for aught that appears to the contrary, to renew his ravages as soon as liberated! It is but a few days

* Matt. xxvii. 16.

† John xviii. 40.

‡ Mark xv. 7.

since Jesus entered the city in triumph, the citizens hailing his entrance with shouts of hosanna, and spreading their garments and palm-branches, the emblems of victory, in his path. It cannot be that they will hesitate between the felon Barabbas, and their recent favorite, Jesus.' Though deep-rooted envy has instigated the prosecutions of Jesus by the priests, yet the people are to decide who shall be liberated. There is every prospect that Pilate will escape this perplexing affair.

The people are now gathered in crowds, round his tribunal, with their request upon their lips, that he will do as he has ever done unto them. Pilate ascends the judgment-seat, full of hope that it is now for the last time, and proposes to them the subjects of their choice. "Whom will ye that I release unto you? Barabbas, or Jesus, which is called Christ?"* The multitude are inclined, of course, to demand the freedom of Jesus. Of course, because we have no intimation throughout the account, that the populace were opposed to Christ. The ever vigilant priests see them wavering, and on the point of de-

* Matt. xxvii. 17.

feating all their murderous schemes ; — for if the cry of “ Jesus,” be once raised, it is all over with them ; — but the multitude are easily swayed. It is their forlorn hope, and the haughty group of ecclesiastics disappear among the crowd, and go from one to another, to persuade the people that “ they shall ask Barabbas, and destroy Jesus.” They rack their ingenuity for pretexts. They represent Barabbas as an injurer, but only of their temporal affairs, whose audacity and boldness they can turn perhaps against their Roman oppressors ; while Jesus assaults their religion, speaks against their temple, slanders the priesthood, and infuses soul-destroying heresy into the common mind ; moreover, he is a hated Galilean, a despised Nazarene, a friend of publicans and sinners, a glutton and a wine-bibber, in league with Beelzebub : yet he claims to be greater than Moses, nay, than Abraham, even the Christ, the Son of God ! With such insinuations and misrepresentations, they influence the leading spirits of the throng according to their wishes.

While the Scribes and Pharisees are thus busily persuading the people, an incident oc-

curs to Pilate, which sharpens his eagerness to hear the response ascend for the release of the Redeemer. A messenger approaches the judgment-seat, from the wife of Pilate, saying from her, "Have thou nothing to do with that just man; for I have suffered many things this day in a dream, because of him."*

The trial of Jesus resembles throughout the examination of a sacrifice, that he may be shown to be "a lamb without blemish, and without spot." The testimony of his innocence, comes not only from friends, but from enemies and from strangers. The traitor confessed that he was "innocent." Herod found no fault in him. Pilate constantly maintains that he has done nothing wrong; and now we hear the testimony of his wife to the same purport. When Peter and his fellow-disciples have hidden themselves from his trial, and the women that loved him, are "afar off," God raises up witnesses for him from Gentile strangers.

The Greeks and Romans attached great importance to dreams, as did also the Jews. They supposed that their gods, through their

* Matt. xxvii. 19.

medium, communicated their will to men, and often thus revealed future events. Before the canon of inspiration was completed, God did often employ this mode of revealing his will, as in the case of Joseph, of Peter, of Ananias, and of Cornelius. There is nothing improbable in the supposition, that of this kind might be the dream of the governor's wife. Whether she was a believer in the true religion, is uncertain. But we may more safely suppose her dream to be the natural result of her present mental state. She could not be unacquainted with the more prominent particulars of Christ's history. He was the theme of conversation throughout Jerusalem. She must have heard of his entry into the city; of his raising of Lazarus; of his lofty claims to the Messianic office; of the jealousy of the Jewish dignitaries. These facts would make a strong impression upon a vivid imagination, and her slumbers might be haunted with visions of the innocent man, in the hands of his enemies, delivered up by her husband, to their rage, and their dim conceptions of the judgments of God, descending upon their heads for his injustice. And when she awoke

and learned in reality, that Jesus stood arraigned before Pilate, an apprehension of the fulfilment of the remainder of her dream became too like a reality. However it was, the dream produces a deep influence upon her mind; and, to calm her fearful anticipations, she sends a page with a request that Pilate should have nothing to do with this just man. Surely Pilate has evidence upon evidence, respecting the course which he ought to follow.

Conscience distinctly seconds the appeal of his wife, and it is with real grief and sorrowful perplexity, that he hears the easily-persuaded populace before him respond, by dictation of their whited-sepulchre leaders, "Release unto us Barabbas." * This is apparently his last resort of extricating Jesus and himself from the murderous intentions of his enemies, and he struggles manfully against defeat. But he has ventured already too far, and his struggles are too late; and yet we cannot but pity the unhappy procurator, guilty though he be. He has involved himself, through the want of a noble decision, in the meshes of a

* Matt. xxvii. 21-23.

net, from which he will forever in vain attempt to deliver himself. The perspiration gathers upon his brow, and his nerves are drawn to the utmost tension. With the tender entreaty of his wife ringing in his ears, and the placidly resigned aspect of Jesus awakening his sympathies, all the Roman in his nature is roused, and he rejoins to the demand of the multitude, — “What shall I do then with Jesus, which is called Christ?” He expects perhaps that the people will request the deliverance of Jesus also, on the slight punishment at which he had before hinted. But no! They have just been trained by the priests, and “they all say unto him, Let him be crucified.” “Why, what evil hath he done?” responds the governor. “But they cry out the more, Let him be crucified.”

Reluctant still to surrender Christ to this undeserved ignominy, Pilate strives to change their outrageous determination. Three times he repeats the proposal of liberating Jesus, but each time the response comes up more loud and decided from the crowd, — “Let him be crucified.”* The priests, by their artful,

* Luke xxiii. 22-23.

diabolical logic, have succeeded in inflaming the populace to a reckless and ungovernable rage, as if Pilate, by being reluctant to grant their impious request, were forcing their rights from their grasp. And when he still hesitates, they begin to press upon him with no ambiguous demonstration of their feelings. Wrathful glances are cast from one to another, the immense sea of heads chafes to and fro, and bitter words of deep denunciation, like the subdued mutterings of distant thunder, are struggling to find vent, in louder reproaches. Pilate dares not stand before the threatening storm which heaves and beats against the very foundations of his throne.

“And when Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person; see ye to it.”* Through such a solemn appeal to their religious sense of justice, he hopes to open their eyes to the dangerous brink ^{upon} ~~into~~ which they have hurried him and themselves, that an apprehension of certain consequences may

* Matt. xxvii. 24.

deter them from dashing down the dark yawning abyss. It is an attempt too, on his own part, to pacify the demands of conscience and natural justice, and to hush the tumult in his distracted breast, by throwing the responsibility of the death of Christ from himself, upon those before him. The response indeed, reverberates from the densely-crowded area, loud and deep as he can desire, "His blood be upon us and upon our children;" but neither the awful imprecation can relieve the guilt-burdened soul, nor the purest water cleanse the blood-stained hands of the pusillanimous judge. His own subsequent conduct betrays the fact that this ceremony has not stilled the conflict within him.

He now leaves his seat in front of his palace, and retires into the inner court where the first examination of Jesus was conducted. He goes to put in execution his last project. The narrative leads us to suppose that he had not yet formally given sentence against Christ, though he has plainly left the impression upon the minds of his prosecutors, that he has yielded to their demands. It was the practice of the Romans, to scourge a person

condemned to crucifixion, in order to increase the pain and disgrace of that punishment. Pilate had told the Jews, as he left the bench, that he would chastise Jesus, and they supposed he has now withdrawn to comply with this practice. But this very custom has suggested one more method of inducing the people to acquiesce in the release of the Redeemer; namely, that of working upon their sympathies, by exposing the lacerated body of Jesus after being scourged. Perhaps a sight of his blood will make them relent. A device worthy of Satan!

To try this inhuman experiment, he has now withdrawn into the court.

According to Roman law, scourging did not take place till after condemnation. Until sentence was pronounced, an accused person enjoyed every protection which the law could furnish, both against injustice and personal violence. But, like the preceding violations of this principle, the scourging is wrested from its place and intention, and is made a means to mollify the unholy demands of feared accusers.

We can have but a feeble idea of Roman

scourging. The Jewish mode was the ingenuity of torture, but the Roman exceeded it in keenness of pain. Scenes of suffering, especially of human suffering, are abhorrent to the feelings ; but the present object, to present a faithful narrative of the closing events of the life of the Redeemer, necessarily leads us into a detail of such scenes. At every blow of the lash, at every shrinking thrill of the nerves, let us not forget that our sins armed the thongs.

With this deeply humiliating reflection then in our hearts, let us leave the street, and go into the inner court. It is now nearly the third hour of the day, or nine o'clock in the morning. Nearly the whole band of Roman soldiers, probably more than a hundred, have been gathered in the area. On one side stands Jesus, bound, according to Roman custom, by his hands, to a column. His back has been laid bare for the bloody scourge. A soldier stands by him with this instrument in his hand. Like the modern scourge, it was composed of several thongs fastened to a handle of iron or wood. Into these thongs or lashes, were braided jagged bits of iron, and

other metals, and sometimes small sharp bones. When thus prepared for tearing the flesh, the scourge was called a *scorpion*.*

At the command of the procurator, the soldier draws the thongs through his fingers to separate them from each other, and then, whirling the lashes about his head to increase their momentum, he brings them down with velocity upon the naked flesh. The sharp corners of the iron penetrate the skin, and, as the blows are repeated, tear it away by fitches, till the lacerated tendons and nerves are exposed quivering to the sight. A new place is selected, and the blows are applied until the body presents one mangled surface, dripping with blood and smarting with anguish. But the patient sufferer utters no cry or complaint. Though, as was predicted, “the ploughers ploughed upon his back; though they made long their furrows,”† yet, “as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth.”‡ Inconceivable patience! unspeakable love! “For by his stripes we are healed.”§

* See I Kings xii. 14.

† Psalms cxxix. 3.

‡ Isaiah liii. 7.

§ Isaiah liii. 5.

The Romans were not limited, as the Jews were, to forty stripes, but applied the scourge according to pleasure. And as Pilate meant to move the sympathies of the hard-hearted persecutors, we may well believe that the scourging was pushed to the very extremest degree of acuteness which nature could bear; and as the Saviour is in the hands of soldiers who hated the Jews to perfection, we know they did not bring down lightly the horrible whip upon ~~the~~^{his} shoulders ~~of the Saviour~~.

The scourging being finished, Christ is given up to the brutal pastime of the guard.* As he is charged with claiming to be king of the Jews, they make the charge a subject of their raillery, and show their coarse buffoonery in dressing up Jesus in the mock badges of royalty. They throw over his bleeding and painful shoulders an old purple robe, such as the Roman officers wore at that time. It was made of woollen, fastened with a clasp upon the right shoulder, and bound about the body. While this is doing, others have found a branch of the thorn for a crown. It was probably the *naba* of the Arabians, a pliant

* See John xix. 1-3, compared with Matt. xxvii. 27-30.

shrub, with very dark-green leaves, and covered with numerous slender and sharp spines, which, being slightly poisonous, caused acute pain and swelling, in flesh punctured by them. They weave its supple branches together in the form of a triumphal crown or wreath, and press it upon the head of Christ. A sceptre is needed to complete the insignia. A stalk of the reed, which grew abundant around the river Jordan, and was used for walking-sticks, is picked up about the court, and put into his hand. Thus arrayed, some of the soldiers form around him like a body-guard, and the rest approach him as subjects and kneel before him, saluting him in the fashionable style of the court, "Hail, king of the Jews! all hail to you! Long live the king!"

Finding that Jesus is neither provoked nor moved by these, the most cutting, indignities which could be cast upon an Oriental, they become themselves enraged, and turn their sport into abuse and cruelty. They spit in his face — of all insults the most shameful — they strike him with their hands; and, taking the heavy reed out of his hand, they beat him upon the head, and drive the sharp thorns of

his crown into his temples, till the blood trickles down his face, and drops upon his garments and upon the ground. This treatment must cause the more acute pain in his swollen veins, for he had suffered similar indignities at Caiaphas' palace, not six hours before. But amidst all this accumulated suffering and insult, more trying to the pure soul of Jesus than all his bodily pain, he still endures it so composedly, and with such a melting look of benevolence for his heedless tormentors, as still more awakens the determination of the observing governor to try again for his release. But why, O Pilate, why so many repeated efforts for this purpose, when none but thyself has the power to rescue him? When none but thyself canst condemn him? Art thou so afraid of man? too timid to thwart the unjust purposes of a rabble who may throw thee from thy political elevation!

When the soldiers have exhausted their skill in imparting misery, at the command of Pilate, they lead Jesus out upon the elevated platform in front of the palace, in sight of the congregated throng. Pilate precedes them, and, as he again takes his seat, he ex-

claims, pointing backwards to the approaching guard, "Behold I bring him forth to you, that ye may know that I find no fault in him!"* At these words, the soldiers, now on the stand, open, and display Jesus in their centre, still wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. With eager interest in the effect of this sight upon the popular mind, the Roman judge points to Jesus, and says, "Behold the man!" Lest the people's sympathies should be excited by this sight of one of their own number, the chief priests and officers instantly vociferate, "Crucify him, crucify him." Their obedient tools take up the cry. The impulse spreads through the dense mass; and one long, angry shout rolls up towards heaven, like a volume of darkness from the pit,—"Crucify him."

Nothing can exceed the dramatic ferocity of the scene. There stands the man Christ Jesus, elevated above their heads, pale with exhaustion and acute suffering, decked in a soldier's short cloak, old and faded, and his face disfigured with bruises, and spotted with the blood which oozes from the punctures of the thorns bored into his brow. Behind him

* John xix. 4.

stand the soldiers, looking ferociously on the hated people and the hated victim. Pilate is not far off on one side, irresolute, anxious, pointing to the meek object of this diabolical persecution, and endeavoring to awaken a tone of sympathy in his behalf. In the street below, up and down, as far as you can see, are the heads of chief priests, Scribes, Pharisees, strangers, idlers, boys, mingled together, swaying hither and thither, a sea of passion, relentless and blood-thirsty. From the dense mass ascends the death-doom of the Son of Man. The sight of their bleeding victim, instead of softening their resentment, inflames their tiger hearts the more, and with fierce gesticulations and in menacing tones, they demand the extremest tortures to be inflicted upon their incarnate God.

Pilate's last resort has failed him. The sufferings of Jesus have not melted his relentless enemies. Dejected and at war with himself, he orders the guard to return with Jesus into the court; he remains himself a moment behind, as if he hoped some propitious circumstance would yet occur to relieve him from his dilemma. He is evidently in a state

of confusion. Every attempt of his to satisfy the priests, without surrendering Jesus, has failed. He is baffled, brought to a stand by their indomitable perseverance. He sees what he believed before, that it is for envy they have delivered him,* and that Jesus is entirely innocent of all their charges, but he fails in the moral courage to face the hierarchy. And when he now sees this highest proof of their inflexible determination, he impatiently exclaims, "Take ye him and crucify him, for I find no fault in him."† 'If you are resolved upon his destruction, do it yourselves. I cannot formally sentence an innocent man; you must assume the responsibility; you must go, in the face of law and of justice, to accomplish your ends.'

What is now to be done? The Jews cannot get Pilate's sanction to their murderous work. He has repeatedly pronounced Jesus innocent of the charge of treason, and has now decidedly refused to sentence him. But they have resolved that Christ must die. The charge of sedition has failed. They have no other resort than to unmask their real accusa-

* Mark xv. 10.

† John xix. 6.

tion on which the sanhedrim had condemned him. Addressing themselves to Pilate, they reply, "We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God;"* This law referred to the punishment of blasphemy.† That Christ has incurred its penalty, is a position of their own assuming. Their appealing to it, more than ever convinces Pilate of their designs, to put Christ to death. He sees that they have employed the charge of sedition only the surer, and the sooner to obtain his sanction to their intentions. He sees that they have stooped to deception, to secure his official signature, and that all their apparent zeal for Cæsar, is but the cover of their unprovoked hatred to Christ. But the reason of their present accusation arrests his attention.

The Roman procurator was a heathen idolater, and a polytheist. That the gods should appear in a human form was no new doctrine to him. It was inwrought into his whole system of mythology. He was taught to believe in the whole celestial family of gods and demigods and heroes. When, therefore, he

* John xix. 7.

† Leviticus xxiv. 16.

heard that Christ claimed to be the Son of God, "he was the more afraid."* He gave the heathen construction to the claim, and a hundred circumstances rush before his mind, substantiating the opinion that Jesus is something more than mortal. The vague reports of his actions which have floated to his own ears—his whole deportment before his tribunal—his calm, unmoved patience—his peculiar conversation about his kingdom in another world—and not least, the dream of his wife, strengthen the probability that he must be 'a Son of a God,' as the original may be translated. He shudders at the deep pit on whose brink he has been standing. He has, he thinks, nearly condemned a celestial being. He may have incurred the displeasure of the gods, for his wavering indecision to comply with the dictates of his better judgment, and for his yielding so far to the clamors of the Jews, who were *infidels* in heathen estimation, as that, in order to mollify them, he had scourged and mangled this son of deity. Full of fear from such reflections, he leaves the platform and hastens into the court

* John xix. 8.

to satisfy his rising apprehensions by directly asking Jesus whence he is;* whether he be of celestial or of human origin. "But Jesus gave him no answer." A fine opportunity, one would naturally suppose, for correctly instructing this dubitating heathen: but not so thinks Christ. And a moment's reflection will reveal to us the divine wisdom of his silence. He had already informed the governor of his character and kingdom. He had proved his innocence as a Son of Man, and this proof should be a sufficient reason for his acquittal. Moreover, Pilate's question is suggested by heathen notions, and, if he answer him, it will confirm him in his polytheism, for he has before shown that he has not interest enough in knowing 'what is truth,' to stay for an explanation. Jesus is therefore silent.

Pilate feels insulted by this silence. In his present perplexed state, he is irritable, and can brook nothing from him who is the innocent occasion of it. He therefore testily exclaims, "Speakest thou not unto me? Knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee?"†

* John xix. 9.

† John xix. 10, 11.

He intends to intimidate the Redeemer by a display of his authority over him, and to induce him to secure his favor by a compliance with his request. But Jesus rebukes his official pride: "Thou couldst have no power at all against me except it were given thee from above; therefore, he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin." 'Self-potent as thou mayest feel, thou canst go no farther than the will of God hath decided. God is the fountain of power, and thou canst do only what his hand and his council hath determined before to be done.' They, therefore, Judas and the sanhedrim, who have invoked this ordinance of God—the civil power—to accomplish their malicious designs, have the greater sin. They array God against himself. They would use for murder his own commissioned authority.

Pilate feels the force of Jesus' reply. He perceives that he is but the tool of Jewish hate, and that he shall but bring greater guilt upon himself if he shall yield to their machinations. His official pride is roused, and he is still more determined not to surrender Jesus to the cross. But it seems as if the procura-

tor was infatuated. He knows that he alone can condemn, or release the Saviour; this he has very proudly, just asserted; and he is continually resolving that he will acquit him, yet he hovers over the line of decision, bowing and trembling, like the pliant osier before the popular breath. This indecision is his besetting sin, and through it he finally falls.

But to go on. With his mind for the moment made up to release Christ this time, he returns to the street, and again repeats his convictions of his innocence, and his determination to release him. But he is met with louder and more menacing exclamations than ever before. At this moment the priestly fury is at its height. A good part of the morning has been already consumed. Many of them have neglected their duties at the temple. Accusation after accusation has been ruled out. Pilate has acquitted their victim of them all. Their last attempt to condemn him under their religious code has failed; and what resort have they more? Satan will not leave his children without a pretext to get the heel of the Son of Man under his foot. He supplies them with a suggestion.

Pilate is himself the subject of a most jealous master. The most tyrannical of rulers is now in the imperial chair at Rome; Tiberias Cæsar, suspicious and captious beyond all his predecessors. The procurator of Judea is under his control, and he well knows his character, and trembles at nothing so much as at his displeasure. And the Jewish priests know it, too. And, by the advice of Satan, they avail themselves of his fear to accomplish their nefarious project.

“If thou let this man go,” significantly shout the crowd at Pilate’s feet, “if thou let this man go, thou art not Cæsar’s friend. Whosoever maketh himself a king, speaketh against Cæsar.”* This is a broad intimation that Pilate himself shall be accused of infidelity to his sovereign, if he longer refuse to condemn Jesus to death. Here are Romans enough present, envious of his distinction, to carry the information to Tiberias; and if they will not, the priests will not demur to accuse him to his Syrian superior: and if but the merest suspicion should reach the ears of the jealous emperor, it will seal the fate of the

* John xix. 12.

procurator. The threat is a fearful weight rolled into the scale against the supple conscience of the Roman judge. It overbalances his conscientious scruples, and eclipses the fear of the gods. He cannot hazard his political elevation, and his life perhaps, for the harmless person before him. With the logic of Caiaphas, he concludes it is better that one of the populace should perish though unjustly, than that he should hazard his own safety. The lingering strife in his breast is decided.

He calls Jesus again from the inner court, and takes his seat upon the elevated platform where he is accustomed to give official decisions. This was a raised stage, probably separated from the palace, in the middle of an open area. It was called *gabbatha*, or the pavement,* because the floor was laid with small pieces of marble of various forms and colors, called *tessellated*, or mosaic work. This kind of flooring was then exceedingly fashionable among Roman provincial officers. Seated here in sight of the whole populace, "he officially gave sentence that it should be as they required."† In revenge perhaps

* John xix. 13.

† Luke xxiii. 24.

upon the crafty Jews, he, to the very last, ridicules their hypocritical accusations. "Behold your king!" "Away with him! away with him! crucify him!" they respond. "Shall I crucify your king?" says Pilate. "We have no king but Cæsar," the accusers reply. "Then delivers he him, therefore, unto them to be crucified?"* and withdraws into his palace. Although it is but little past the third hour of the morning,† yet he has performed a work whose consequences shall reach through the earth, through heaven, and through hell, forever! A work which shall never cease to harrass his soul with unavailing reproaches!

* John xix. 14-17.

† Mark xv. 25, compared with John xix. 14. The apparent contradiction of the hour in these two passages may be reconciled, by admitting an error of the transcribers in John; or, without such a resort, (to be avoided when possible,) by supposing, that Mark specifies the time when sentence of crucifixion was pronounced, which might be just before ten o'clock; and that John gives the hour when he was actually affixed to the cross. Thus, Christ might have been sentenced before ten. The procession would occupy an hour in reaching the place of crucifixion. At *about* the sixth hour, that is, between eleven and twelve o'clock, the work of affixing to the cross was completed, and Christ was suspended in suffering. ~~This~~ *thus* contradiction is avoided, and the apparent difference proves the honesty of the narrators.

Thus ends the trial of Christ at the tribunal of the mistress of the world. The incarnation of perfect holiness has been condemned by the race.

We have now almost done with Pilate as an actor in these scenes. He appears but little longer on the sacred page. We have a subsequent conference between him and the chief priests, respecting the phraseology of Christ's sentence, and respecting a guard to the sepulchre where he was buried; and with Joseph of Arimathea, for liberty to bury the corpse of Jesus.

But I cannot proceed without arresting the progress of the narrative a few moments, to take a farewell glance at the unhappy procurator, as he disappears from the stage. His prominence in the sacred account will allow of such a diversion, and it is demanded by the object of these pages.

Chagrined and dissatisfied with himself, he has retired within his palace. His reflections, now that his signature is affixed to the death-warrant of Jesus, are certainly unenviable. His flagrant injustice must be obvious to him in his cool moments. And though he may

feel that he has saved himself from political death, he cannot anticipate a future state with any such pleasing reflection.

It is difficult to delineate the character of Pilate. His conduct, throughout the whole trial, is strange and inconsistent. Convinced, from the beginning, of the innocency of the Redeemer, knowing that he only has the power to rescue him from outrageous violence, yet, instead of exercising his official power, and dismissing the accusers from his tribunal, he parleys with them, and endeavors to induce them to withdraw their prosecution. In this, he plainly shows himself *to be governed by an excessive love of popularity*. And yet, other acts in his procuratorship prove him to have been sometimes entirely reckless of the favor of his subjects. In the present case, however, the rank and number of the plaintiffs at his bar, are not counteracted by any diverse interest of his own. On the contrary, it is for his present apparent interest, to stifle the convictions of his own judgment, and even the evidence of his senses, rather than incur the resentment of the influential priests, who can easily make his office unsafe for his life.

But in yielding so cowardly to the unjust demands of a dangerous faction, he violates one of the finest laws of his country. "The idle clamor of the populace is not to be regarded, when they call for a guilty man to be acquitted, or an innocent one to be condemned." He must have forgotten one of the maxims of Horace, whose poems he had doubtless often read in his boyhood :

"The man in conscious virtue bold,
 Who does his secret purpose hold,
Unshaken hears the crowd's tumultuous cries,
And th' impetuous tyrant's angry brow defies."

By this one act of timid compliance to selfish interest, he has secured a name which will forever cleave to him. Wherever the sacred narrative of the sufferings and death of Jesus is known, in earth or heaven, will it also be known, that *he was condemned to the cross by Pontius Pilate.*

Yet we are in danger of measuring the Roman officer's guilt, by the light which we ourselves enjoy. We must remember the extenuation which the Holy Ghost has recorded : "Whom the princes of this world knew not, for had they known, they would

not have crucified the Lord of glory.”* Pilate, as well as Herod, might have known the exalted character of the person ignominiously dragged before him, and by him so unjustly crucified; and this renders his ignorance inexcusable. The fact that he did not know the dignity of Christ palliates the awful guilt of “crucifying the Lord of glory.” Had he been convinced that Jesus Christ was “the true God and eternal life,” to have thus condemned him, had been sacrilege to an inconceivable degree. As it is, he trampled upon the principles of conscience and right, in an alarming manner. In fine, his constant efforts to divert the malicious accusations of the Jews, show in him a strong sense of justice, and a conscience not blunted by hardened guilt. His tampering with the prosecutors shows a willingness to keep on the popular side, even at the cost of justice. His final decision, shows the selfishness of his heart, and his ruling ambition.

The historical accounts of him, agree with the above features. Philo, the Jew, represents him as a man who “set justice to sale,

* I Cor. ii. 8.

plundered the people, and executed the innocent;” though some deduction from his statements, for national prejudices, may be required. According to Josephus, “he was not naturally disposed to unnecessary bloodshed, but, whenever the peace of the province appeared in danger, stern, decided, reckless of human life, — on all other occasions, by no means regardless of ingratiating himself into the popular favor.”

What were the subsequent feelings of Pilate in view of his part in the death of Christ, we are left to conjecture. That he ever believed in him who died that believers might be saved, is more than doubtful. His career in Judea did not continue much longer. The procurator had made himself unpopular, by previous oppressions upon the Jews. His compliance at this time with their demands, did not secure him from the evil which he anticipated. He was deposed, four or five years afterwards, for an assault upon the Samaritans, summoned to Rome to defend himself, and was banished by the emperor, Caius Caligula, to Vienne, in Gaul, where he committed suicide.

Thus closed the earthly scene of the unhappy Pilate. Visions of the meek, bleeding countenance of the Redeemer, may have haunted and harrassed his soul. He could not have forgotten the most remarkable event of his procuratorship. He must have felt the fulfilment of his wife's dream, in the judgments which fell upon him, for condemning the innocent blood. Some oppressive weight bore upon his spirit, and made his life a load, which he thought he could not endure, and he took the madman's relief, of rushing into sorrows yet more dreadful, from which he can never escape. But his bones have mouldered back to dust, and no man knoweth his resting-place. The nations walk over it, heedless of the hand below which signed the death-warrant of the Son of Man.

But his dust is watched, and Jesus, whom he crucified, will call it at the last day, that he may render to the unjust ruler that strict justice which he refused to him, in the days of his humiliation. Then will Pilate know "whence he is,"—*the Lord the King of glory.*

I cannot close this already prolonged chap-

ter, without adding a few reflections suggested by the trial of Jesus. One reason why this trial is so minutely described is, that the true character of the heart may be developed in its various phases. Nothing can excel or equal the description in perfect delineation of nature. No uninspired mind could write it.

The trial is remarkable also for the number of different characters introduced, and the perfect distinctness with which each preserves its peculiarity. Every thing is natural, — is human nature developed in its strongest outlines. Here is the canvass on which to study the actings of the unrenewed heart. Sit down to its contemplation, not with the idea that you behold *devils incarnate*, but *human beings like yourself*, whose actions appear in a strong light because they are contrasted with infinite perfection.

First are the Jewish priesthood; worldly-minded, haughty, self-righteous, and irritable under any thing which threatens to rob them of their preëminence. Because they have been so largely robbed of their power, by their masters, they are doubly jealous of the scanty remainder. Yet they are greedy of

dominion, and ready to hail any measure which will reinstate them in their former independence.

These views tinge their anticipations of the Messiah. They are expecting him to come in pomp as their temporal deliverer; and when, on the contrary, he approaches, meek and lowly, riding upon an ass, they turn away in disgust.

They preserve this character throughout the narrative. Go, look in upon the midnight conclave in Caiaphas' palace. See, in the supercilium and contempt cast upon Christ, the very impersonation of haughtiness! Behold again, the sanctimonious group besetting Pilate's bar, loudly demanding the condemnation of an innocent man, and yet demeaning themselves as if they bestowed a favor upon their heathen magistrate by appearing before him; covering up their flagrant injustice with a cloak of pretended attachment to the honor of God, and of the most disinterested patriotism to their adopted government, which latter especially, they hate with the most profound heartiness. What a mirror for self-righteous

hypocrites, is the erected head and curled lip and haughty step of the sanhedrim !

Next is Pilate. I have already attempted his portrait. I only add, his is not a rare character. Many essentially act his part, who would spurn the cognomen of Pontius Pilate. Many since his time have been swerved from the right by the fear of popular displeasure. Who will venture to say that Pilate is the only one who has yielded their claims of truth and duty, to secure his selfish interest? How many statesmen, let such an one ask, have suited their measures to catch the popular breath? How many have shifted their political creed, to keep still with the ruling majority? How many will sacrifice any thing and every thing, to avoid the charge of being an enemy to the reigning Cæsar?

And the Roman soldiers who scourged and insulted and abused the Redeemer, — what analysis of their conduct will you make? *They obeyed orders. To scourge and crucify was part of their profession.* They scourged the Son of Man, they made him their sport and scoff, as they had done other condemned persons. They bent the ~~bow~~ in mockery, to
Knee

the King of kings and Lord of lords, as they had often done before, to others; and if they did do all this with indifferent ignorance, in the way of business, will it make their practice right? Will they not be marked objects of shame at the last day? Certainly. They had no right to enter upon a profession which necessarily required such outrages at their hands. And they whose profession it is to pander to the vices of others — they who violate the Sabbath in the way of business — they who furnish the means of intoxication — they who traffic in human flesh — will find that their plea of *trade* will be overruled in the Supreme Court of the Universe, however they may escape indictment at earthly tribunals.

Another glance at the pure, unmoved object of all this scene of outrage! He stands calm and patient, his face beaming with unutterable pity upon the relentless priests, the wavering judge, and the reckless soldiers! when honestly addressed, frankly answering, when insulted, uttering no reproach. “Behold the man!” Can you join hands with those who scourged and condemned him! Can you turn from his redemption for which he

paid this price ! Shall this whole scene be of none effect to convince you of the natural hostility of the heart to holiness ? Shall not the matchless display of love, displayed in stooping to such indignities, melt your hard heart, and subdue you to yield to the man of sorrows, who bore the chastisement of your peace, and by whose stripes ye may be healed ?

“ Behold the Man ! He knew no sin,
 Yet Justice smites him with her sword ;
 He bears the stroke that else had been
 The sinner’s portion from the Lord.

Behold the Man ! though scorned below,
 He bears the greatest name above ;
 The angels at his footstool bow,
 And all his royal claims approve.”

CHAPTER VI.

The Crucifixion.

SCRIPTURE NARRATIVE. Matt. xxvii. 31-61. — Mark xv. 20-47. — Luke xxiii. 26-55. — John xix. 16-42.

THE Jewish and Roman law, both forbade execution for a capital crime to be inflicted on the same day as the trial. Among the Jews, punishment was delayed until the third day after arraignment. A law at this time was in force among the Romans, allowing ten days' delay, previous to execution. But such is the eager haste of the rulers at this time, that in less than twelve hours from the apprehension of Christ in the garden, they have him on his way to execution. Into this brief space of time, they have crowded his examination at Annas' house, at Caiaphas' palace, and at Herod's and Pilate's judgment-seat.

The farce of a trial at this latter place, was concluded at the third hour of the morning; and before the fourth, the preparations for crucifixion have been completed. The cross, the nails, the mallets, and the other necessary

instruments, have been brought from the fort Antonia, where these articles were kept. The Saviour has been stripped of his purple robe, and his own garments have been again put upon him. If we may believe tradition, and the sacred narrative does not contradict it, the crown of thorns has been left upon his brows. The two malefactors, who are to be crucified with him, have been brought from their cells, that they may accompany him to the place of punishment. The centurion and his band, are on the ground, to conduct the procession, and the four military executioners are waiting, with their instruments of cruelty in their hands. Around the group are gathered crowds of people, drawn together, some by idle curiosity, to witness the—to them—novel sight of a crucifixion; some in obedience to that natural impulse which always gathers a multitude to a public execution; and some in pity for his fate, who, they had hoped, “was he who should have redeemed Israel.”

As crucifixion was the most ignominious punishment employed among the Romans, every possible indignity was shown to the unhappy wretch condemned to its disgrace. All

felt at liberty to vent the vilest opprobrium upon the criminal's head. Not only the executioners, but the spectators, exerted themselves to insult and deride the victim with every thing that can sting the spirit of man with pain. This punishment among the Jews was connected with their religious feelings. He who suffered it, was accursed, a reprobate, eternally lost; and they felt allowed to treat him as such, nay, obliged to repress every sympathy, and shut him out from the common offices of humanity. We cannot enter into, or in any measure realize their feelings towards the cross. The estimate of the gibbet, the pillory, the gallows, among us, is honorable, compared with the Oriental reputation of the cross. Be not surprised then at the spirit of ridicule and reproach with which the whole proceeding is conducted by the Romans, nor the readiness with which Jewish hatred seconds their cruel outrages.

The Son of Man is exempted from none of 'the shame,' of the cross. Although weakened by his long vigil on the previous night, and by the loss of blood, in his severe scourging, his reduced strength is not favored by his ex-

ecutioners. According to their custom, a rope is tied about his neck, or body, by which he may be 'led away' to the spot of crucifixion, and the heavy wood of the cross is placed upon his scourged and bleeding shoulders. The cross was no light burden, for one in full strength. Its usual height was about ten feet. Two or three feet of the length, was inserted in the ground, elevating the person from fifteen to thirty inches from the surface of the earth. There were various forms of the cross. That on which our Saviour suffered, probably, according to the usual representation, resembled a 'T', the upright part projecting a few inches above the cross-piece, where the head rested, and to which the title was affixed. In the middle of the perpendicular part, was a seat, projecting like a horn, sometimes smooth, but oftener rough and sharp, on which the criminal sat, to prevent the nails from tearing through the flesh, and to prolong his sufferings.

To carry such a cumbrous, irregularly-shaped machine, was a painful task to a man in full possession of his energies. Upon the lacerated shoulders of the Redeemer, its rough-

hewn and splintery edges must have pressed with exquisite suffering, and must have sent darting pains and faintness through his weakened system, even if he had been allowed to toil steadily and leisurely along. But this he is not allowed to do. For he is 'led away,'* dragged along in no gentle manner, by the rope attached to his body, towards the hill Calvary; now pulled in this direction, and now in the opposite; first to the right hand, and then to the left; the subject of the merriment of the rabble who shout at his trembling, stumbling steps along 'the dolorous way.' The exertion is too much in his present weakness. His humanity, though sinless, is capable of pain and exhaustion—most exquisitely so. Its texture has not been hardened and calloused by sinful excesses; and every nerve, thrilling under the rough treatment, hurries its complaint to the brain, and the sympathizing muscles refuse to bear the unequal burden.

The soldiers, seeing Jesus faint and sinking under the weight of the cross, seize upon the Jew nearest at hand, who appears to be his

* John xix. 16.

disciple. He happens to be Simon of Cyrene, a city of Lybia in Africa, where many Jews resided. He had come up to Jerusalem to attend the annual festival, and had heard, probably, the teachings of Christ, and embraced them. Him they compel to carry the lower end of the cross, leaving the heaviest still to be borne by our Saviour. It is a disgraceful outrage upon the man, but now is an hour of excesses.

Again the procession advances. The shortest distance from Pilate's palace to the spot of execution was about four hundred yards or one eighth of a mile. Monkish tradition has traced the 'via dolorosa,' of much longer distance; but no confidence can be placed in such legendary accounts unless corroborated from other sources. The evangelist Luke has recorded an affecting incident which occurred on the way.*

Among the multitudes drawn together to witness the crucifixion of Christ were many women. It is not intimated that any of the sex had appeared at his trial. The common people were not as a body opposed to him.

* Luke xxiii. 27-31.

Seduced by the misrepresentations of their rulers, they had indeed asked his death, but ever fickle, and as nature sides for the moment, with wretchedness whether deserved or not, they were now many of them moved, by pity for his sufferings, in his favor. This pity was strongest felt by those who had not shared in the excitement of the scene at Pilate's judgment-seat. Among these were doubtless the Marys, and his acquaintance, and the women that followed him from Galilee.* Anxious uncertainty agitated their breasts during his trial, and when at its termination, they learn from the echoing shouts that he is condemned to the cross, and when they see the ignominious procession on its way to crucifixion, their sympathies draw them after it to witness what they cannot remedy. "They lamented and bewailed him." Others, personal strangers to Christ, are affected by his sufferings, and their mingled lamentations fall upon the Redeemer's ear. He is touched by this expression of sympathy, so widely different from the wanton cruelties of those immediately around him.

* Luke xxiii. 49.

To them he turns and speaks the language of prophetic admonition. "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children. For behold the days are coming, in the which they shall say, Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps that never gave suck. Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us ; and to the hills, Cover us. For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?" 'Behold in the cruelties inflicted upon me, an innocent man, a faint foreshadowing of the miseries soon to fall upon this guilty nation, and save your tears for your own calamities at your doors, in comparison with which the solitary loneliness of sterility, and a suffocating death, will be hailed as a blessing.' In the lifetime of some of these very daughters of Jerusalem, did their unsurpassed woes come upon them, and the truth of the prediction flashed before their eyes in all the vividness of reality.

The procession has at length reached the summit of Golgotha, and the crosses are taken from the shoulders of Jesus and the male-

factors, and laid upon the ground. This place, "now groaning under the weight of monastic piles," was then an open spot, used for gardens; elevated above the vicinity, a small mound upon a larger eminence, just out of the walls of the city, yet so near, that a spectator from the wall could read the inscription upon the cross.* It was situated on the northwestern side of Jerusalem, by the junction of two public thoroughfares, leading from the city to Bethlehem and to Joppa, so that numbers would necessarily pass by whenever it was the scene of a crucifixion. Hence, it had been long used for such executions, and the bones of criminals scattered upon its summit, or, perhaps its shape, had given it the name of Golgotha or Calvary, 'the place of a skull.' The Romish Church of the Holy Sepulchre now surmounts the spot, and several convents cluster around it, but to the Jew of antiquity, no place was more shunned for its ceremonial uncleanness, and death upon it was to him the very climax of disgrace.

Here at last Jesus stands, snatching a mo-

* John xix. 20.

ment's repose from the galling burden of the cross now lying at his feet, while the preparations are being made for his death.

So distinctly is the impression of the scenes preserved by the sacred narrative, that no imagination is needed to summon the whole before us. Around the little elevation are the unconcerned soldiers of the centurion's band — a sort of guard, that the executioners may proceed without interruption. The neighboring wall is thronged with the blood-thirsty machinators of this tragic display — the priests, and their abettors, the Pharisees — too interested, wholly to quit the spot, and too sanctimonious to defile themselves by approaching nearer. Here they can witness and torment, by their taunts, the last moments of their hated victim, without legal contamination. The indifferent populace crowd every favorable post of observation, around the base of the eminence. Among them are mingled many of the followers of Christ, the women who wept his fate, and those who had hung upon his persuasive lips in Galilee. Pressing as near to the soldiery as possible, are those most warmly attached to him; Mary Magda-

lene, Mary, the wife of Cleophas, and Mary the mother of Jesus, leaning, with a heart pierced with anguish, upon the beloved disciple. All these are gazing with sad and tearful eyes upon the movements of the party in the centre. The hitherto forward Peter nowhere appears. Deeply is his breast wrung with compunctions, and through misty eyes he watches the scene from some point in the background. The rest of the twelve are hidden among the spectators, grouped in small companies by a common interest in the fate of him whose care and whose counsels they have so long enjoyed; a fate, it may be, soon to be their own.

But with all this mass of beholders let us turn our eyes to the summit of Calvary. While a cavity is being prepared in the ground for the erection of the cross, one of the executioners presents the Redeemer with a draught of sour wine mingled with some bitter drug. One evangelist calls it "vinegar mingled with gall," another, "wine mingled with myrrh." There is no discrepancy in the terms, for the vinegar of Palestine was wine soured, and dead. Diluted with water

it was a common drink of the Roman soldiers. It was called 'p^oisca,' and was a cool and refreshing beverage. But instead of water, myrrh or some other bitter, stupifying drug was now infused into it. It was the Roman practice to give such a potion to criminals at their execution to intoxicate and stupify them to the excruciating pains of their lingering death. It was indeed at first an alleviation, but afterwards it produced a severe augmentation of their misery.

Our Redeemer tasted ^S of this potion, hoping it may be the cooling drink of the soldiers, but finding it to be an intoxicating mixture he rejects it. He will bear the agony of the cross unalleviated, and wrestle with the powers of darkness with an unclouded intellect. He came to suffer. His bodily sufferings were a necessary part of his work of preparing a way of salvation, and he will not allow of their mitigation.

The preparation of the ground being finished, the executioners strip Jesus of his garments, which are cast aside on the earth for the present, and proceed to fasten him to the cross. Four soldiers are employed in this

revolting transaction. Each roughly seize a limb, and precipitate the Saviour upon his back, on the cross. His arms are extended along the cross, to their utmost length. His feet are drawn down in like manner. Each soldier with one hand places the blunted end of his rusty iron spike, in its proper place among the strongest tendons of the ancles, and palms of the hands—those feet that went about only to do good! those hands that were never extended but to bless!—he raises his hammer in the other. The stillness of nature's sympathy pervades every breast of the dense mass of spectators, broken only by the smothered noise in the streets; and the crushing sound of the heavy mallets thrills through every ear, as their rapid blows force the large rough nails through the quivering nerves and bones of the patient sufferer, and fasten them deeply and securely into the wood. The blows cease, and a simultaneous sigh relieves the surcharged bosoms of the beholders. During this most painful process of affixion, nothing but the involuntary shrinkings of flesh and blood is exhibited by the Redeemer. Without a struggle, he yields to the

rough handling of his executioners. Calmly and silently he waits their blows. Under the exquisite tortures of the body, his soul unruffled contemplates his ignorant murderers with compassion, and his parched and pallid lips murmur for them the affecting prayer, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." * All the world has not produced an example of such melting tenderness, nor any thing similar to it, except it has been among his own followers. No! It is only the child of God, who can love his enemies, and pray for those that despitefully use him.

Although the soldiers little heeded the compassionate petition at the moment, intent as they were upon their savage work, they doubtless subsequently experienced the answer of Heaven in their conversion.

The cross, laden with its victim, is dragged a little distance to the proper position. The upper end is slowly raised to the right degree of elevation, and then, the whole weight being lifted from the ground, to infix it the more firmly in the earth, it is suddenly dropped into the hole prepared to receive it. Every

* Luke xxiii. 34.

muscle and joint of the agonized sufferer is wrenched with the violence of the shock, and the wounded and bleeding extremities, torn by the iron pins, dart a thrill of inconceivable anguish through the system.

As the blessed Redeemer comes up to the sight, pale and exhausted, what heart does not pulsate with rushing velocity, and utter the ejaculation of irrepressible compassion? There he hangs at last, the only perfect being who ever walked this fallen world, the victim of human hatred and cruelty, suspended between heaven and earth, seemingly an accursed thing deserted of God, and exposed to the malice of men and devils! * Yesterday, at this hour, he was at the house of some one of his followers, in the suburbs of Jerusalem, and all his disciples were about him. To-day, he hangs in excruciating suffering on the accursed tree, and not one friend present to move a finger for his relief! Did not the word of God explain to us this mysterious transaction, we should doubt the justice of Him who ruleth in heaven, and doeth his pleasure upon the earth! But it is explained, and that ex-

* Isaiah liii. 4.

planation brings the only ray of hope to the lost sons of men. But this I must defer for the present.

As soon as the soldiers have affixed the two malefactors upon their crosses, one on either side of Christ, they turn to the distribution of their effects. These, according to Roman law, were the executioners' fees.

All the earthly wealth of our Saviour, embraced only the two garments of the poorer classes, "the raiment and the vesture." The raiment, or outer garment, was only a straight piece of cloth, about ten feet in length, and five or six feet in width. It was therefore easily divisible into four parts, the more so, as it was probably composed of four distinct pieces. The vesture, or inner garment could not be so divided, as it was woven whole, an opening being left for the head, and on each side for the arms. This peculiarity did not belong to the Saviour's garment alone; although such garments were not common. They were, therefore, highly esteemed; the more so, as this was the prescribed mode of making the vesture of the high priest.* So

* Exodus xxviii. 32.

says Josephus. Some friend had given this garment to the Saviour, as a mark of respect; it may be, a follower, who already regarded him as “the Apostle and High Priest of our profession.” The ownership of the vesture, is decided by lot. And yet, trivial as this act may seem, it did not escape the predetermining purpose of God, as its prediction sufficiently shows. “They parted my raiment among them, and for my vesture did they cast lots. These things *therefore* the soldiers did.” *

The division completed, the executioners throw themselves upon the ground and “watch him there.” With unconcerned indifference they look on, to enjoy his expiring miseries, and to prevent any rescue. So have they done many a time before, and with the same want of interest they observe the Son of God, little dreaming, and as little caring, whom they have tortured, and what infinite, what endless results, their ignorant agency is accomplishing.

The enemies of the Redeemer will surely now be content with the result of their diaboli-

* John xix. 24, and Psalms xxii. 18.

cal machinations. But no! No sooner is the cross erected, and the tile affixed upon it, than some of the chief priests go straightway to the Roman judge, that the offensive claim, "This is the king of the Jews," may be altered.

It was the Roman law to attach the name and the crime of a condemned person to the cross upon which he was executed. Sometimes the same was proclaimed by a herald, who preceded the procession to the place of punishment. Pilate had accordingly written a title, to be nailed to the cross of the Saviour. As the Jews had accused him of claiming to be the king of the nation, so he was determined to have it, in revenge for their duplicity and obstinacy. On their original charge he had condemned him, and from that he extracts the title or accusation, "Jesus of Nazareth, king of the Jews." This was written upon a white board with black letters, in the three different languages then most in use; the Latin, which was the *legal* tongue, the Hebrew, or ecclesiastical, and the Greek, the prevalent language of the common people. Thus every spectator, Jew, Hellenist and

Roman, could understand the crime for which Jesus suffers on the cross. *

The Jewish rulers are fearful lest this positive assertion by the judge, of the character of Christ, should awaken a dangerous sympathy for him, among the people. For they had been taught to look to the advent of the king of the Jews, as an end of all their oppressions. Hence they demanded that it may be altered to this: "He said, I am king of the Jews." But Pilate, sick of their solicitations, abruptly answers, "What I have written, I have written." He has already yielded more than even his conscience will allow of truth and justice, and, as an amends, is determined to be pertinacious in trifles. Thus the title upon the cross, shows the true character of him who is suspended upon it, and the real ground of his crucifixion. It shall not be altered, for it is truth. Let him who would know the character of Christ, go and read the hand-writing of Pilate — "The king of the Jews," — He who bared His arm to de-

* This variety of languages will explain the different versions of the title given by the evangelists. Some copying one language, and some another.

liver them from Egyptian oppression ; who led them through the wilderness like a flock ; who gave them His laws, and ruled them by His prophets, till they rebelled and desired a king like the nations of the earth,—He is the king of the Jews, the Almighty, the ineffable I AM. He it is who now hangs upon the cross, the Sovereign for the guilty subject, the Judge for the criminal. Well may the conspirators to this horrid deed desire to cast the awful responsibility from themselves. But they cannot even in appearance. “What is written, is written ;” and, chagrined, they return to wreak their disappointment upon the head of the Son of Man.

Fearing lest the favorers of Christ may make use of the assertion of the title, to defend his claims to the Messiahship, they determine to prejudge the minds of the populace by ridiculing his pretensions. How else can we account for the inhuman malice which can so exult over the miseries of a dying man, and add to his exquisite pangs, the cutting reproof of imposture ? How else can we explain the shortsightedness which now sports with, as chimerical, claims which a while ago

they pretended were dangerous enough to deserve death? There is no honesty in all their smooth speeches. The most rancorous hatred towards Christ and his doctrines, fills their hearts. They are excessively jealous of the least influence which any but themselves obtain over the minds of the people, and their resentment is kindled to an incontrollable flame, that this Galilean has enlisted so much sympathy. To one who admits the hostility of the natural heart to holiness, the scoffs of the rulers will excite no wonder. The denier of this fact must furnish his own solution why the innocent Son of God should be the object of such malignant aspersions, from which the deserving malefactors at his side are entirely exempt. He that believeth that "the carnal mind is enmity against God," will detect only the overflowings of that enmity in all the outrages and abuse of this present hour. "We may challenge universal history," says Scott, "to furnish another instance in which any person, expiring under the torture of a cruel execution, was treated with such derision, contempt, and mockery, by all ranks and orders of men, and even by one at least of his

fellow-sufferers ; and this is a full demonstration of apostate man's rancorous enmity to the holy image, truth and law of his Creator."

But to return to this display of hostility. The scene of crucifixion, it will be recollected, was close to the walls of the city, on a rise of ground near the public roads leading to Bethlehem and Joppa. Every passenger must go in full view of the cross. Some of them, who must have been particularly acquainted with the previous accusations against Christ, wag their heads contemptuously, and with insulting gestures, ridicule his alleged pretensions. "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."* The chief priests on the wall, with the scribes and elders, catch up the gratifying example, and exultingly retort upon the silent sufferer. "He saved others ; himself he cannot save. If he be the king of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. He trusted in God ; let him deliver him now if he will have him ; for he said, I am the Son of God."† The

* Matt. xxvii. 39, 40.

† Matt. xxvii. 41-43.

soldiers waiting to prolong the infernal sport, cast upon him their coarse vulgarity. One of them, to heighten the ridiculousness of his pretensions to royalty, by exposing his helplessness, goes to him, and, holding up his vessel of *pasca* towards his mouth, invited ^s him to help himself to a draught, adding, "If thou be the king of Israel, save thyself."* Even one of the malefactors can find it in his heart to reiterate the reproaches which come up from every quarter, and cast his pretensions in his teeth. "If thou be Christ, save thyself, and us."† Although he hangs himself, upon the verge of eternity, and needs every part of his remaining strength, to prepare to meet that God whose commands he has publicly set at defiance; yet he can squander his last moments in defaming and contemning his God and Judge. His hardened iniquity strikes his companion with compunctions of conscience, and he cannot withhold a severe rebuke to his audacity. "Dost thou not fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? and we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this

* Luke xxiii. 36, 37.

† Luke xxiii. 39-43.

man hath done nothing amiss." Turning his head towards Jesus, as well as his painful situation will admit, he entreats, "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom." He had been an abandoned thief, like his companion, and in the beginning of his crucifixion he had joined with the rest in their contempt of Christ.* But the calm, meek endurance of suffering and reproach hour after hour evinced by the Redeemer, arrested his attention. Perhaps he recalled some former occasion when he had heard indistinctly the nature of Christ's kingdom explained. His mind was illuminated by the Holy Spirit to perceive the justice of the Saviour's claims, and his heart was melted in view of his own awful guilt, and more awful prospects. God bowed his stubborn will to embrace Jesus as the promised Messiah, at the very last lingering moments of his probation. Though his views of salvation were exceedingly obscure, yet he knew enough to perceive a door of hope opening in the sufferings of his exalted companion. To him then he turns, with the prayer of humble

* Matt. xxvii. 41.

penitence upon his dying lips. Jesus knows his heart, and graciously grants his request. "This day thou shalt be with me in paradise." It is a gush of life to the expiring malefactor! It is a proof of the claims of Christ, in opposition to all the obloquy and contempt cast upon him. It is a positive assertion of his right to admit into heaven whom he will. It proves him to be "the true God, and eternal life."

Man has poured the last ebullitions of his enmity upon the head of the Son of Man. Jesus rises calmly and serenely above them. But another and another struggle awaits him, before he can raise the shout of victory.

The sufferings of our Saviour were of two kinds, bodily and mental. Part were from visible causes, part were from invisible causes. The sufferings of the body sprung from the malice of man, and from its sympathy with the anguish of the soul. The suffering of the spirit arose from the assaults of hell, and from the wrath of God poured upon him when he stood our substitute, and bore our sins on the tree.

We have followed him in his endurance of

the wrath of man. An ignorant spectator would have discovered no difference between his sufferings and those of his companions on the cross, except as the taunts and jibes of the crowd were aimed solely at him, and except also in the resigned calmness with which they were borne. But we approach now to a period when unexampled and astonishing prodigies appear, and the most indifferent observer is compelled to exclaim, Some hidden mystery is involved in the death of Christ!

It is now nearly twelve o'clock. Jesus has been hanging upon the cross probably nearly three hours, with an anguish increasing every moment in intensity. We have no conception of the intolerable sufferings of death by crucifixion. It is the most refined torture which the cruel ingenuity of man has ever invented. It kills by pain, most skilfully and exquisitely applied. The executioner never approaches a vital part. He begins at the extreme parts of the system, and there with rusty ragged iron, he tears an opening through the sensitive nerves, and then suspends the whole weight of the body by the irritated muscles of the extremities, in a most un-

natural and painful position, in which it is impossible for the sufferer to move without intensely augmenting his distress. The blood presses into the head and fills the laboring veins almost to bursting. Thirst, faintness and delirium, assaults the life with increasing violence, till at last the system sinks, inch by inch, under the weight of exquisite excruciation. Add to this bodily torture, the insults and abhorrence of the victim's fellow-men, and the gloomy apprehensions of endless wrath, (for, to a Jew, the 'cursed tree' was a sure precursor to future wo,) and you cannot add another pang of distress to the misery of him who is condemned to crucifixion.

Yet under such sufferings the Son of Man has hung for three hours, patient and silent. An incident occurs during the time which shows how true his pure soul is to one of the great purposes of his life, — exemplification of the moral law. 'The beloved disciple,' who alone of the disciples was affected by it, is the only one who has recorded it.

At the beginning of this tragic scene, the female followers of Christ had stationed them-

selves 'afar off,'* to witness his lamentable end. As the insults and reproaches of the unprincipled mob increase in fury, their sympathy increases their courage and draws them insensibly nearer and nearer towards their Master. This natural impulse operates strongest upon those most warmly attached to Christ; and before the period of the darkness arrives, Mary, the mother of Jesus, her sister, the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene, are standing with John, among the soldiers near the foot of the cross.

While multitudes of men with calloused hearts are heaping derision upon the innocent head of the Son of Man, and while all his public and private disciples, except John, many of whom must be present, are concealed in the background, his female followers show their confidence and attachment to the last: following him from Galilee, a distance of seventy-five or a hundred miles, gathering with breathless interest every incident in his previous persecutions, accompanying him to the cross, and not shrinking even from his closing suffering and disgrace. Never has

* Luke xxiii. 49

the female character appeared more amiable! Never has female constancy shone more resplendently than in this little group of the Marys by the side of the cross!

And of all his disciples, these four are just the ones, whom we should have selected for such an exhibition of attachment. Their known characters, and their previous history, must have bound them in strong bonds to the Redeemer. To Mary of Magdala, much had been given, for out of her Christ had cast seven devils;* and she in return loved much. And in the hour when her deliverer is in agony and reproach, the scorn and contempt of men, she shows her gratitude by a tender exhibition of her willingness to share in his disgrace to the last. And whom should we expect to find at the cross but maternal love? Whom but the Mary who had borne the honored title of *mother* to the man Jesus; who had cared for him in his infancy; who had pondered his youthful sayings in her heart, and whose spirit, in the words of her own triumphal song, “had rejoiced in God her Saviour?”† But it is not maternal affection

* Mark xvi. 9.

† Luke i. 47.

alone, which now draws her to the feet of the expiring Son of Man. No! She has ceased to look upon him as her son; she looks up to him as her incarnate God and Saviour. The idea of being mother to a temporal messiah is now being torn from her mind, and, while she lifts her tearful eyes upwards to the dying Jesus, she feels that her temporal notions must vanish; and though she must still regard him as the promised seed, she yields to the belief that he is to bruise the serpent's head, and bless all nations in some mysterious way to her yet unknown.

'*She stood,*' is the language of the sacred narrative. She does not prostrate herself in the hopelessness of despair. She does not bow down under the weight of inconsolable disappointment. But she stands, sorrowful, bereaved, yet calm, submissive, believing. Her wonderful life has prepared her for this trying scene, and the language of the venerable Simeon, in the infancy of the dying man now before her, now comes with the tranquilizing power of prophetic truth fulfilled. "Behold this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel: and for a sign which

shall be spoken against; (yea, a sword shall pierce through thine own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.”* But let no popish veneration in us, suppose that her presence or her sorrow adds the least efficacy to the sufferings of the Saviour, or even exalt^s her above her companions.

By her^a side, stands her sister Mary, the wife of Cleophas, and the mother of James and Joses. Often have they taken sweet counsel together concerning the wonderful Son of David, and now they twine their faith and affection together in the severity of their distress.

Near to the three Marys is ‘the beloved disciple.’ His Master is taken from him. The bosom on which he has so often leaned, in filial love and confidence, is now throbbing with the last painful efforts of expiring nature; and the tongue is swollen with thirst, whose life-giving tones have so often enraptured his soul. The thought of the end of all his delightful fellowship oppresses his heart and fills him with grief. But that his Master is the Christ, the Son of the living God, he will

* Luke ii. 34, 35.

not doubt, though his days do end in the gloom and disgrace of the cross.

But I dwell too long on the reflections which the little group before the cross suggest.

Jesus regards the heart-stricken mother and the favorite disciple with the tender emotions of his humanity. With a look of inexpressible tenderness he first addresses her,—“Woman, behold thy son.” Then, in nearly the same tone, he commits her to the disciple;—“Behold thy mother.” His only social responsibility is not discharged till almost the extremest hour of his suffering. What a model of filial affection is this example of our dying Saviour! How like a radiant beam of Heaven’s own light does it contrast with the infernal darkness which shrouds the brutal throng around! How lovely does the Redeemer appear in thus making his afflicted mother his care, even in the midst of the intense sufferings of the cross, and in providing for her, in her poverty and reproach, a home at the fireside and in the affections of the most loved and most faithful of all his disciples! O, let the children, who turn over

their parents to the cold solitudes of a deserted old age, or to the heartless charities of strangers, stand here under the cross, and compare the tender interest of *their exemplar* in his lonely mother!

But we must hasten on from this beautiful exhibition of the spirit of the gospel, though it be like leaving the warmth of the sunny nook to be enveloped in the damp chills and darkness of midnight.

It is now the sixth hour. The sun is in the zenith, and shines down with tropical brightness. All nature around is clothed in the smiles of opening spring, unconscious of the outrages committed upon its Maker. Unconscious? No! awful signs of sympathy are at this moment displayed. The sun, which a moment since was beaming transparently upon the earth, suddenly disappears from the heavens, and darkness rolls its billowy clouds over Calvary, and the whole land. It is not the dense blackness of midnight, but an oppressive gloom, shrouding all surrounding objects in obscurity, as if a funereal pall were thrown over the heavens, shutting out the light of the sun, and leaving the earth to be

dimly seen by a few wandering rays cut off from their source. It is a darkness in which every building and tree and hill towers upwards in misty gigantic proportions, and the eye, unsatisfied, strives in vain to connect into a definite whole, their broken, magnified outlines.

Consternation seizes every beholder. The soldiers start up from their lazy postures, and the blood beats in rapid pulsations through their superstitious veins. The centurion is lost in amazement, and many a query crowds into his mind respecting the man who hangs before him. To the disciples it is an appalling proof of the might of their Master. It strikes superstitious terror and apprehension into the guilty throng of spectators, and stops for a moment their ridicule and uproar. In vain do the infidel priests peer into the gloom to solve the inexplicable phenomenon. It is not a cloud which obscures the heavens. The sky has a lurid transparency, deepening, as it recedes, into darker and darker intensity of gloom. It is not an eclipse, for the moon is at the antipodes. They can assign no cause for the darkness, but they will leave it un-

solved, and harden their hearts against its testimony rather than believe it to be nature in mourning sympathy for its Maker.

Not only the immediate beholders of the crucifixion are involved in this preternatural darkness, but it extends to the utmost extremes of the Holy Land. How much farther its sombre shades reached we cannot know.*

Why is this darkness? It is a *miraculous attestation* of the Almighty to the infinite dignity of the sufferer on the cross! And it is also a *proper accompaniment* to the scene into which the Saviour now enters. It is proper that signs of woe should cover the face of nature when God the Redeemer travails in agony for the guilt of man. Blackness should cover the face of the sun when the Almighty pours his wrath upon our substitute, and displays the awful terrors of His law to his soul.

* This darkness is supposed to be referred to by Phlegon, a Roman astronomer, who says, speaking of the fourteenth year of the reign of Tiberias, in which year it is conjectured our Saviour was crucified, "The greatest eclipse of the sun that was ever known happened then, for the day was so turned into night, that the stars appeared." (Barnes' notes, in loc.) Dionysius, the Areopagite, at that time in Egypt, is reported by Suidas to have said, "The world is coming to an end, or the God of nature is in an agony."

Nature should not smile when Jehovah frowns. If the mount in the desert trembled, and was wreathed in whirlwinds, lightning and smoke, when God announced His holy law, how much more, when He came to magnify that violated law and make it honorable. Should he not lay His hand upon the earth, and shroud its guilty inhabitants from His sight, in the moment of His holy indignation?

When the earth is thus ominously deserted of the light of heaven, the Saviour enters upon a new source of suffering — a source which we cannot describe nor realize; that trial respecting which he had so earnestly prayed in the garden of Gethsemane. The combatants have been preparing their weapons of attack and marshaling their forces during the previous hours; and when the darkness envelopes the Son of God in its folds, it is to wrap him in a skirmish with the prince of this world. For three long and painful hours does the strife continue.

There have been hours in the history of the world when untold interests have been at stake, and then nations have halted in breathless interest to await the result. There have

been battles on whose issue life and liberty, or slavery and death for millions, have depended; and which issue has itself depended upon, and been decided by, a single adroit movement. The excitement of such moments have wrought up witnesses and hearers to the highest pitch. But never, in the universe, have been three more important hours than are these three, when the everlasting interests of a world of condemned sinners are thrown into the scale, and the hand which holds the balances is wrapt in darkness on the little summit by the road to Bethlehem. If ever there were silence in heaven it was when the angelic hosts suspended their employments to behold the conqueror come forth from the wine-press which he was treading alone in his agony, till his garments were dyed in his blood.

These hours of darkness were the hours when it was decided whether God "could be just and justify the penitent believer," or whether "the soul that sinneth must die." They were ~~three~~ hours when it was decided whether a sinner could be forgiven or must be damned: whether the gates of paradise

should be reopened to the admission of the apostate sons of Adam, or whether they must be endlessly banished from the presence of God.

There is no period which ought to be deeper engraven upon our hearts — which ought to be more attentively studied — than this, when earthly scenes are preternaturally and instructively hidden from our eyes. And if you are uninterested in the issue of this contest, wo be unto you! The darkness which envelopes Judea's hills and plains has not yet passed from your souls; and it will not, if you do not feel your everlasting hopes are here involved; but will gather in thicker folds around you, till you are wrapt from the sight of mortal things, and gulfed in "the blackness of darkness forever."

One hour and then another slowly rolls away; and the third hour has arrived. The gloom has gathered, ~~and~~ⁱⁿ thickening, wreaths on the summit of Calvary till it seems almost impenetrable. All business is suspended. The passengers halt in perplexity in the streets. Deep, palpitating fear beats in almost every breast, and the day of final doom seems

at hand. The groups around and upon Golgotha strain their eye-balls to read their neighbors' countenances.

In the moment of intensest darkness, is heard a voice mighty, clear, piercing from the summit of Calvary, "Eli! Eli! lama sabachthani?" "My God! My God! why hast thou forsaken me?" It is the voice of Jesus, breaking the long and painful silence. It bespeaks the extremity of his suffering! It is the overflowing of his cup of sorrows. Now are rolled upon him the sins of the world, and the approving smiles of his Father's countenance are withdrawn from him. He is left to struggle under the weight of God's wrath against sin, unhelped by that life-giving communion with the Father, which he has ever had with Him, since the world began.

Here is the spot, and this is the time, to sit down and contemplate our guilt and our deserts. With that agonizing cry ringing in our ears, we should ask ourselves what it denotes! Why is the only-begotten and well-beloved Son of God, thus deserted of the Father at a moment when the ingenuity of man is racking his body to its ultimate extent

of endurance, and the hatred of Satan is assaulting his integrity with all his hellish art? Why, but that Jesus is forsaken in order that we may be visited? Why, but that he is left in anguish that we might be saved from hell? And if the withdrawal of the light of God's countenance can so make the pure and holy Saviour exclaim, what must be the soul-rending anguish which shall distract the sinner who is driven away in his wickedness, and "punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power?" O, it is an awful subject for contemplation! Standing at the foot of the cross enveloped in darkness, and with this exclamation of Christ in our ears, we shudder at the inconsolable misery of the lost! Who will neglect the redemption of the gospel, and run into such doom!

At the cry of Jesus, some exclaim, "This man calleth for Elias."* As Elijah was universally believed to be the forerunner of the Messiah, the mockers pretended that Jesus still meant to maintain his claim to this character; and there is resemblance enough be-

* Matt. xxvii. 47.

tween the words Eli and Elias to afford a ground for the blasphemous comment.

The corporeal sufferings of the Redeemer have been all the while increasing in severity. Nearly six hours he has now hung in this excruciating position. Yet a cry of thirst, which was so parching as to drive ordinary sufferers to rave deliriously for water, is the only exhibition of bodily suffering that our Saviour gives during the time. This he uttered immediately after the above-mentioned exclamation.* A vessel of vinegar stands near the cross, set there for the use of the soldiers who watch him. Some one takes a sponge, and, dipping it in the vinegar, puts it upon a stalk of hyssop, and elevates it to his lips. Jesus drinks of it. He does not refuse it, as he did the wine mingled with myrrh. Some are unwilling that even this poor mitigation should be allowed him. "Let be," say they, "let us see whether Elias will come to save him."†

We draw to the close of the painful history. Again a loud voice reëchoes from the hill. "It is finished!" Yes! It is the shout of

* John xix. 28.

† Matt. xxvii. 49.

victory! It is the cry of the Mighty One trampling the principalities and powers of darkness under his feet! The strife is ended! The victory is won! The fidelity of Jesus to the great work is proved! His sacrifice is completed, and the trembling hopes of all departed saints are immoveably established, and a solid ground spread out for all who will to cluster around the fountain of pardoning love!

The triumphant words are no sooner uttered than the darkness around rolls up in absorbing folds, and vanishes into the light of day. The cloud of desertion passes from the brow of the Redeemer. Inexpressible joy in the return of the Father's love, in the near approach of his own exaltation, and in the endless, blessed results of his sufferings, fills his soul. Knowing that the work of redemption is completed, that he has finished the work his Father gave him to do, he commends his human soul into the hands of God, and with a strong cry, "he bows his head and gives up the ghost."* He *voluntarily* yields his life. He, as God, cuts the thread of his human ex-

* Luke xxiii. 46.

istence, and hovering angels, waiting anxiously for the moment, guide the man Jesus to the abodes of bliss.

But to the spectators all this glorious termination is hidden in obscurity. Instead of the light in which we contemplate his expiring cry, to them it is involved in darkness, and accompanied with prodigies of terror. For no sooner does the head of the man of sorrows drop upon his breast, than the earth heaves beneath their feet with tremendous commotion, like the fluctuating billows of the ocean. "The hills round about Jerusalem," resound with the rending of their massive ledges, opening the tombs of the dead excavated in their sides, and displaying the sheeted corpses, disturbed in their final resting-places, and called once more into life. The great veil of the temple which divided 'the holy' from 'the most holy' place, is rent from the top to the bottom, and the sacred residence of the cloud of Jehovah's presence, into which only the high priests entered, and that but yearly, is laid open to the view of all who enter the adjoining apartment. The partition-wall is broken down, for there is a new and living

way now accessible, and the imposing solemnities of the temple have from this moment vanished away.

These miraculous prodigies, attending the death of Christ, and attesting to his infinite dignity, cause deep impressions to be made on most of the beholders. The centurion and the soldiers, who have, for the last three hours, been watching Jesus with unfeigned amazement, with deep and trembling fear exclaim, "Truly this was the Son of God!" But the emotions which seize their minds at the instrumentality which they have had in these events, are unmentioned in the sacred narrative, though not difficult of conception. Their derisive cruelties must now fill them with apprehensive regrets. The multitude return to the city, one by one, beating upon their breasts in fear and trembling under the fearful apprehension, lest they have wantonly killed their long-expected king. As the retiring throng leave the ground, the Marys and John cluster around the cross, and gaze up into the rigid features which once beamed upon them in love. Though their hearts are wrung with anguish and disappointment at

this fatal termination, yet they cannot but feel a relief that the agonies of their suffering Master are over.

Yes, the melancholy drama has closed. Jesus, the man of sorrows, is dead. Cold and motionless he hangs upon the cross, his head drooping upon his breast. His tongue is silent, and his eye is glazed in death. But a single circumstance remains to be considered, before we may leave this most solemn and heart-rending scene. This circumstance, though apparently trivial, is of the utmost importance in establishing a fact *essential* to the gospel, namely,—*that Christ did actually die*; that he did not swoon, and afterwards recover, but that he actually and veritably died, and therefore, that he must have risen from the dead, when he subsequently appeared to the disciples. And had the inspired writers arranged their arguments to prove directly the real death of Christ, they could not have more conclusively established the point than they have done by their artless array of circumstances, in the remainder of the narrative. So that all the spectators, enemies as well as friends, Pilate and the

chief priests, the soldiers and the disciples, are made to testify to the fact of his death.

The populace had been already convinced that Jesus was dead. When the darkness had disappeared, and the concussions of the earthquake had ceased, and they saw the head of the Saviour dropped motionless upon his breast, and the body swayed down and hanging by the nails driven through the hands, in all the helplessness of death, there could be no doubt to them that the tragedy was finished. Appalled, as has been said by the fearful omens which had accompanied the Redeemer's death, they returned back into Jerusalem, to ponder upon the meaning of these prodigies. The chief priests, now that their purposes are accomplished, hasten down from the wall, some to their official duties, which they had neglected, some to secure the death of the malefactors, who still hung in misery, and some to project further measures to obliterate the influence of the Saviour from the minds of the common people; all hardened under the solemn exhibitions of God's wrath, yet with consciences ill at ease and dissatisfied with all their hypotheses about the cause.

The little elevation, lately the scene of the noise of hundreds of spectators, is now comparatively deserted and still. A few disciples remain behind to see the conclusion of the affair, and witness the disposal of the body of Jesus. The four soldiers, who had performed the part of executioners, in obedience to their duty, stay to watch the corpse and the yet living malefactors, till they receive the orders of Pilate to retire.

It was the Roman practice to leave crucified persons untouched upon the cross, until they died by the natural operation of their own sufferings, and after their death, the body was still left suspended, and exposed to the elements, until it decayed and dropped to the earth. But the Jews were forbidden to allow a criminal to remain over night upon the cross; and if he was alive at the first evening, or at five o'clock, he must be put to death, and then taken down and buried.* The next measure of the chief priests, therefore, is to secure the removal of the persons upon the cross.

“The Jews, therefore, because it was the

* Deut. xxi. 22, 23.

preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the Sabbath-day, (for that Sabbath was a high day,) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away." *

The Jewish Sabbath commenced at sunset, one day earlier than the present Christian Sabbath. The day preceding, corresponding to our Friday, was called the Preparation, because they then made preparation for the observance of the Sabbath. This circumstance determines the time of our Saviour's death; namely, at three o'clock on Friday afternoon, on the day of the full moon, in the month of April of that year. The Sabbath which occurred during the week of the Passover, was called a high day, or great day, because it was observed with more than usual solemnities. The offering of the first fruits of the spring harvest was then presented in the temple. The Jews were unusually punctilious in regarding this Sabbath, so many strangers being present; they were therefore the more anxious that Calvary should not present a palpable violation of their law.

* John xix. 31.

In these questions of Jewish polity, their Roman masters usually did not intermeddle. The priestly deputation therefore had no difficulty in obtaining their request, and orders were sent to the guard, who still watched the criminals, to despatch them. Various modes were employed for this purpose. Sometimes the suspended victims were suffocated with the smoke of green wood, and burnt to ashes with the instrument of their punishment. Sometimes they were put to death by the mode in this instance adopted.

The executioner takes a large sledge, or a heavy bar of iron, and in perfect keeping with the horrid cruelty of the whole mode of punishment, begins at the extremities to increase the agony of pain, till at length it shall overpower the system, and compel a tenacious life to relinquish its hold. He slowly and heavily mashes the bones of the feet and ankles, pausing at each stroke, to see whether the writhing struggles of the victim will end, and then, swinging his bar before the eyes of the doomed man, he gradually approaches upwards, crushing the bones of the legs inch by inch, till the exhausted sufferer, deprived

of the support of his limbs, and his whole weight thrown upon his hands, dies under the savage torture.

One of the malefactors is thus despatched, and then the other. The executioners approach the lifeless body of Jesus, to perform the same inhuman process upon it; but they are spared the labor. Death has already finished his work there, and he, who had just raised his heavy sledge, drops it again, as a needless outlay of strength. But to leave the death of Christ without a doubt, one of the soldiers thrusts his long sharp iron-headed spear into his left side, and pierces the heart. As he draws out the weapon, a mixture of blood and water, which settles in that region after death, oozes from the wound, showing that there is neither life nor vitality there. Satisfied that their murderous task is well done, the soldiers gather up their implements of crucifixion, and leaving the body in charge of a small guard, they return back to Pilate, with a kind of melancholy relief, the momentary feeling which flits over minds inured to scenes of cruelty.

He who was hated and maligned in his life,

has been overcome! The persecuted career of 'the man of sorrows' has closed! And his enemies are triumphing for a moment in their apparent victory. 'His name,' say they, 'is covered with everlasting reproach! The stigma of the cross will adhere to him and to his followers, like the leprosy of Gehazi, forever!' Such is the specious reasoning of the Jewish rulers, as they go about their duties of preparation for the passover Sabbath. But God raises up friends to his cause from a quarter often least expected.

At this moment, is one of the sanhedrim, rich and influential, at Pilate's palace, requesting an order for the body of Jesus, that he may pay to it the last rites of sepulture. He, as a well-known and upright counsellor, has no difficulty in obtaining his request, so soon as the Roman procurator is convinced by the testimony of the centurion who had charge of the crucifixion, that Jesus is really dead.

The shortness of the time which had elapsed since Christ was first suspended on the cross, raised a doubt in Pilate's mind whether he might not have only fainted. "He marvelled

if he were really dead.”* So speedy a death upon the cross, was exceedingly rare. Notwithstanding the unparalleled tortures of this mode, criminals seldom died on the same day. They oftener survived till the third or fourth day, and in some cases, even to the ninth after their affixion.

To account for the speediness of the Saviour’s death, we must not forget that his mere bodily sufferings, intense as they were, were but *auxiliaries* to his mighty mental conflict in which he was for three hours engaged with the prince of darkness, and to the inconceivable weight of our sins rolled upon him in the hour of his extremest suffering, when he made his *soul* an offering for sin. With all these causes of a speedy death, he yet died *voluntarily*. He might have lived hours longer. He would have lived, had it been necessary to make an atonement for sin. But when he had borne the wrath of God against sin, he pronounced the work of redemption ‘finished,’ and quitted the flesh. He lived till he accomplished his mission of love, and then he dismissed his soul from its

* Mark xv. 41.

tabernacle by his own will. As he had said a few days before, "No man taketh my life from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again."* And in choosing the moment of his own death, he shows himself to be that Almighty Being, "in whom all *creatures* live and move and have their being;" — "in whose hands our breath is, and whose are all our ways."

Let us return once more to the cross, to attend, with the scanty band of disciples, the obscure funeral of our Saviour. While our fellow-men are surrounded in their last moments by weeping friends, and are followed to their graves by a cavalcade of bereaved relations, — and we hope to receive similar tokens of parting attachment, — Jesus, the solitary man of grief, the Redeemer of men, is ushered to his tomb by a little group of faithful ones in loneliness and sorrow. No nodding plumes or sable hearses march in solemn procession in respect to the dust honored by the indwelling Deity! No swelling complaints, like the voice of a great multitude, are

* John x. 18.

wafted to our ears, because the Saviour of the world goeth to his home! No! But there *is* respect to his dust, there *is* heartfelt grief for his death, though enveloped in a few humble breasts gathered on Calvary's summit.

The setting sun now calmly and placidly casts his last beams upon the spot from which a short time since he hid his face. Gathered together there are the Marys, the beloved disciple, Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus, and perhaps a few others. In silence and in sadness, they commence upon the office of taking down the body of their Master from the cross. The feet and hands are disengaged from the nails which perforate them, and with gentle care the corpse is lowered down to the earth. The blood-drops are wiped away from the brow. The relaxed limbs are wrapped in spices furnished by Nicodemus, and the whole body is bound in linen cloth. The nearness of the Sabbath will not allow them to perform the regular process of embalming. This is delayed until the Sabbath be past.

These hasty preparations being finished, the group of true mourners once more lift the remains, and carry them a little distance, to a

newly-excavated tomb, which Joseph had caused to be made for himself. ‘Blessed privilege,’ he thinks, ‘that his dust shall soon be permitted to sleep by that in which his divine Master dwelt!’ As it is deposited in the niche, in which no man was ever laid, they take a last glance, one by one, at those motionless features into which they had so often gazed with delight. They come out; the stone is rolled to the door to close the entrance; and in deep grief and discouragement they take their solitary way in different directions, back into the city, just as the sun is sinking below the horizon.

What thoughts possess their hearts, we are left to uncertain conjecture. What plans of conduct are suggested to them we cannot tell. All their prospects are shrouded in gloom, all their calculations are disappointed. In twenty-four hours how great a change has occurred in their history! Last evening, as the sun went down, they were gathered around their passover-tables, indulging dreams of the success which would attend their Master’s teachings at this national gathering of their countrymen.

‘Last evening,’ soliloquizes the favorite disciple, as he walks homewards by the side of his adopted mother, ‘last evening I was reclining upon the bosom of my Lord! I listened to the seraphic tones and heavenly instructions of his lips! To those melancholy predictions which we all felt should never be fulfilled! To that tender prayer which drew out our hearts by cords of sympathetic love! Last night I watched the golden sunset, as it faded away into the dusk of evening, but I thought not I could read my setting hopes in that changing sky. But the storm has swept over us, and, to-night, we are a scattered, broken-hearted band! Our shepherd has been taken from us, and there is nothing left for me, but to care for his dying legacy, and to wander to the lonely spots once blessed by his presence, and to weep my soul away to join the spirit of my Master in the bosom of God!’

‘O! beloved John!’ we are ready to say, ‘sorrow not as those without hope. Thy mighty Lord has but laid himself in the dust of the tomb, that he may burst forth the more

triumphantly, and bear away at his girdle the keys of death and of hell ! ’

But he hears us not. A dark cloud involves all the previous instructions of the Saviour. The tomb is sealed to him. He who raised the widow’s son, and the ruler’s daughter, and the friend Lazarus, is himself subdued ; and when the conqueror falls, who shall raise him again ?

Little then knew John, or his companions, of the unspeakable wonders involved in these mysterious scenes. But in his after-days, the obscure clouds had rolled away from the cross, and with tearful eyes of beaming joy, he could write to all subsequent ages, “ *Here-in is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.* ” *

The soul of John, and of his fellow-disciples, was then satisfied. And as he lingered behind them on the shores of the lonely Patmos, he hailed every symptom of decaying nature as a messenger of hope, and of love from his glorified Lord ; and, when the convoy appeared in sight, to bear him away to that

* I John iv. 10.

throng, a glimpse of which he had caught, and whose anthems of praise he had heard from his sea-girt isle, he hailed it with rapture, "Even so, come Lord Jesus." Sealing up the gospel with his last prayer, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all,"* he handed the legacy to the church, and was borne away in triumph to repose again in the bosom of his Lord and his God.

" And shall we not aspire,
 Like him our course to run?
 The crown if we would wear,
 The cross must first be borne.
 Divinely taught,
 He shows the way —
 First to believe and then obey."

* Rev. xxii. 21.

CHAPTER VII.

Conclusion.

I HAVE completed the plan described in the commencement of these pages. The various incidents of the trial and crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ, have been woven into a single narrative. Whether a similar attempt with the events of the Resurrection and Ascension of our Saviour shall be made, is left to be decided by circumstances over which I have now no control. I cannot close this probably only access to the reader, without a personal request to ponder prayerfully the great moral truths, as it were incarnated in the closing scenes of the life of our Saviour, and to open your heart to their practical influence.

When we contemplate the tragical events of Gethsemane and Calvary, through which Christ passed out of the world, we cannot too constantly or too vividly recollect that they are portrayed, — not for their historic interest, as illustrating the barbarous customs of an-

tiquity,—but to make a sensible impression in favor of holiness and against sin; to show the impartial justice of God, who will not forgive the sinner without a satisfaction to his violated law; and to show His amazing love in giving His beloved Son and equal to render that satisfaction, by assuming human nature, and, after tasting all the sorrows and temptations of sinners yet without sin, by enduring His wrath against their sins, that God might be just and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus. The cross of Christ was erected to make a sensible, impressive exhibition of God's demands and our deserts. And when we gather around this object of universal interest, every event must deepen our impressions of God's inflexible hatred of sin and his unspeakable love of sinners. If we forget this and gaze upon the cross, only with idle curiosity, however deeply our sympathies may be moved for the sufferer, we derive no healing benefit from the sight. *There is no efficacy in the cross of Christ to those who see upon it only a created being, the victim of Jewish rage for teaching doctrines which his countrymen hated: a martyr simply to the*

truth, or dying only that he may prove the truth of a general resurrection. To such it is a stumbling-block and foolishness. It becomes the power of God and the wisdom of God unto salvation to those only, who see there the Lamb of God, slain, a vicarious sacrifice, for the sins of the world. Those only, who, as it were, lose the material view of the cross, in the spiritual effulgence which beams around the God-man, Mediator, suspended upon it, shall be washed from their sins in His blood.

Let this, the alone soul-healing view, never fade from our eyes, whenever we contemplate Jesus dying a ransom for sinners, that he who repents and believes, may be saved; and while the light of earthly things is withdrawn from the sacrifice, may the illumination of the Holy Spirit fill our spiritual vision; that what is most dark and inexplicable to the eye of sense, may be most luminous and consoling to the eye of faith.

We have traced in an inadequate manner, the history of our Saviour from Gethsemane to Calvary — through the last twenty-four hours of his abode in the flesh. I cannot

leave these deeply affecting scenes without inquiring, What influence have they had upon the reader? Some influence they have had. No one can sit down and read the close of the life of our Lord, or indeed any other part of the scriptures, and rise up exactly the same moral being as he was, no better and no worse. It is one of the most momentous facts in our moral history, that every presentation of the truths of the gospel tells upon our character. Like the invisible dews of the early summer, which cause verdure to spring luxuriantly from the earth, or the unburied seed to rot upon the surface, moral truth proves "a savor of life unto life, or of death unto death."

One of these results has obtained as an effect of the present attempt to sketch the closing events in the life of Christ. Your affections have been more strongly developed and fixed upon the Saviour, and against sin, or you have been made more insensible to the beauty of holiness and the deformity of iniquity. Which has been the result in your own case, is a question, whose answer is an index to your future prospects of happiness or

misery. And in answering the question, you have need to remember no caution more frequently, than this, of *not mistaking the excitement of the sympathies for love to Christ*. The infidel Rosseau arose from the contemplation of these touching events, and exclaimed, “Socrates died like a philosopher, but Jesus Christ like a God.” But did it lead him to embrace him as his only Saviour? No man of any humanity can see innocence brutally abused, and not have his sympathies instinctively aroused. But do you call it piety? No; look not here to judge of the moral effect of the death of the Redeemer upon you. But ask yourself as a disinterested third person, whether you feel that your own individual guilt made the sufferings of Jesus necessary;—whether you feel, that, so far as their necessity is concerned, you were their cause as much as any human being;—that your transgressions have equally contributed to make this vindication of God’s violated law necessary, that offers of forgiveness might be extended to you? Unless you feel, besides sympathy, *the compunctions of guilt* at the cross of Christ, it is no more effi-

cacious to your forgiveness than is the cross of Andrew or Peter; and unless you feel a personal interest in the stability of your hopes, you have not been benefited by the contemplation.

O, it is a solemnly responsible position to stand, even in imagination, by the cross stained with the blood of the Son of God, and witness his expiring struggles! There are no beings in the universe who occupy so fearful a place, if you are yet unwashed of your guilt! If you are yet in love with sin! If you have not been there crucified unto the world, and the world unto you! If you fall from the summit of Calvary, what can interpose to prevent your descending to the lowest abyss of ruin! You occupy the very centre of God's most glorious displays of Himself. If they cannot absorb your affections, heaven has nothing adequate to the result. You are surrounded by hosts of wondering angels, exerting their celestial intellects to comprehend the wonders of the cross. They cannot feel its life-giving influence. They gaze as strangers, for they have no experience of what constitutes its attraction, *its adaptedness*

to sinners. Yet they are intensely interested, for here the love of Him they worship is displayed. But you can "glory in the cross of Christ." With eyes dimmed with tears of penitence, you can discern a Saviour slain for your redemption from endless death. Shall this vantage-ground for the exercise of the only ennobling emotions of man, be unimproved? Or shall you, "constrained by the love of Christ," live for him who died for you, through all the trials and temptations of an alluring world and deceitful heart? Remember then him that "endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds."

"Gethsemane can I forget?
Or there thy conflict see,
Thine agony and bloody sweat,
And not remember thee?
When to the cross I turn my eyes,
And rest on *Calvary*,
O, Lamb of God, my sacrifice!
I must remember thee."

B O O K S

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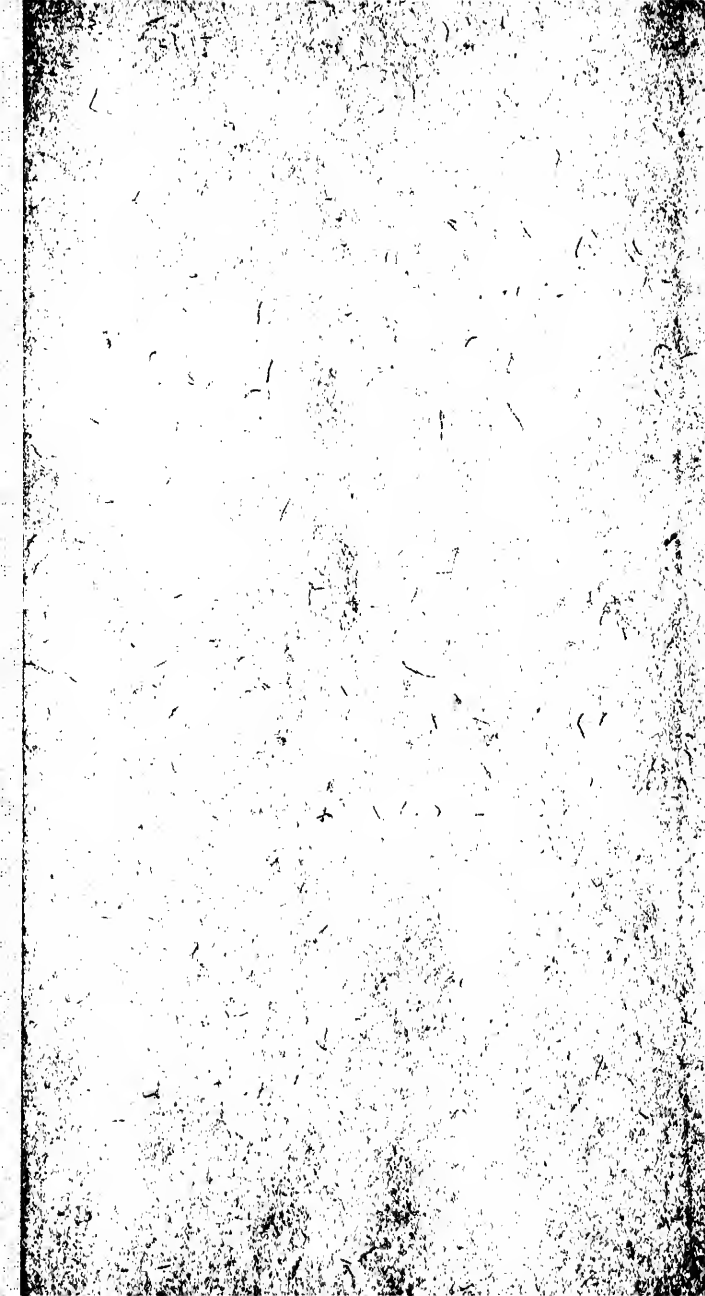
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