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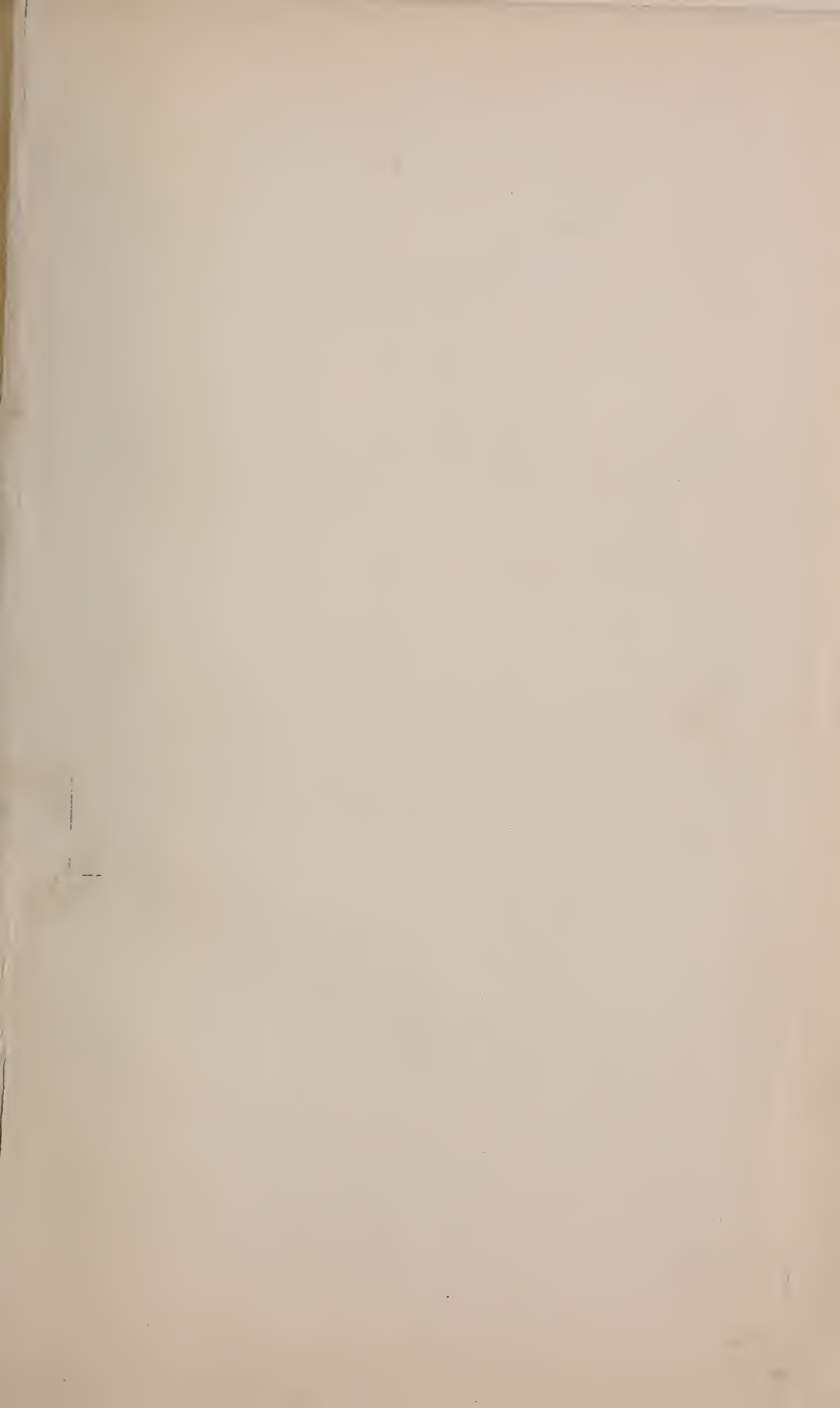
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# JOHN THE BAPTIST,

THE

FORERUNNER OF OUR LORD:

HIS LIFE AND WORK.

BY

ROSS C. HOUGHTON, D.D.,

*Member of The Society of Biblical Archaeology of London, etc.,*

AUTHOR OF "WOMEN OF THE ORIENT," "RUTH THE MOABITISS," ETC.



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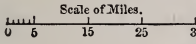


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TO

THE MEMORY OF MY HONORED FATHER,  
**THE REVEREND ROYAL HOUGHTON,**

ONE OF THE PIONEERS

WHO PREPARED THE WAY FOR THE PRESENT PROSPERITY OF THE  
CHURCH IN NORTHERN AND CENTRAL NEW YORK;

WHO FOR MORE THAN FIFTY YEARS WAS A SELF-SACRIFICING, CON-  
SCIENTIOUS, FEARLESS MINISTER OF THE LORD JESUS;

AND WHO, UNTIL THE VERY LAST, WAS SIGNALLY SUCCESSFUL IN HIS  
APPOINTED WORK,

THIS VOLUME IS REVERENTLY AND AFFECTIONATELY

**Dedicated.**



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## INTRODUCTION.

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NO man is entitled to a place in the highest order of greatness solely because he has given expression to great thoughts, or consecrated his energies to great purposes, or set up before himself and his followers a pure and inspiring ideal, or even lived an exalted life and lifted many other men up to his own high level. The greatest men in the world's history are those who have so embodied and vitalized a great truth as to set in motion an intellectual, moral, or spiritual force which has revolutionized the world and made their good influence perpetual. To this highest rank few men have attained; but among the few John the Baptist is fairly entitled to a place.

He was not made by the times; he did not represent the social, or intellectual, or moral life of his age. He was not projected into the life of his nation by some impulse that was already being felt by men. He was not the mouth-piece of some mighty popular enthusiasm; he did not gradually mount to the leadership of a forward movement of humanity which began before he was born. Only in a very limited sense was he ever a debtor to his fellow-men. Under

direct divine guidance he either announced new truths or put life into dead ones. He inaugurated and, for a brief time at least, directed a spiritual movement which has been the expression of all that is highest and best in every succeeding age.

To be sure, he was only a herald, but a herald of the most momentous event the universe has ever witnessed; an event of which the greatest of the old prophets could only speak as far in the future, but of which John was commissioned to say: "Behold the Lamb of God; the Light of the world; the Power of God unto the full salvation of men and nations."

John went before Christ as the plowman goes before the sower. There is but little chance, even for the best seed, until the subsoil is torn up and exposed to the action of the air and light. In strictest loyalty he ran before Messiah the Prince to proclaim the speedy coming of the promised peace and goodwill on earth, to command that all obstructions be removed, that all enemies surrender. He moved through a moral wilderness wherein, like rank and noxious weeds, flourished the basest passions and the most fatal errors. It was the work of a brave, strong, faithful man to assail these formidable evils single-handed and alone. But John did it, like the moral hero that he was. He did it without any hesitation, and without any doubts. He joined battle in downright earnest. He called men and things by their right names. He acknowledged the "sovereignty of

conscience," and commanded all men to follow his example. With voice and form and manner all in his favor, he appealed to the moral sense of the people with the impetuosity of early manhood, with the consciousness of a divine call and a divine message. From the first he attracted and controlled men. He made them haste to put away their sins. He not only proclaimed the near approach of the kingdom of heaven, but he made men long to become citizens therein. He demolished men's cherished ideas and notions, and exposed their secret faults, but still they clung to him and prayed to be taught the truth. He made no mistakes in estimating the characters of those he addressed. Hypocritical men came to him, some even in sacred vestments, seeking for personal gain in the new movement, with which it was easy to connect themselves by a shallow confession and a transient rite; but they soon found their error, for this divinely gifted mind-reader seemed to understand the very thoughts and intents of their corrupt souls. He neither shunned their hatred nor courted their favor; (but as the skilled woodman fells the tallest trees, so he struck the heaviest blows at their mightiest sins.) The keen-edged, glistening ax, as wielded by a strong and fearless arm, was therefore the sign and symbol of this rugged pioneer. Matt. iii, 10.

When John was born centuries had elapsed since a real prophet had appeared in Israel. The ancient prophetic scrolls were read and expounded by the vener-



able doctors of the law ; but the oldest of them had never seen a prophet, neither had he, even in the earliest remembered days of his childhood, spoken with any man who had heard a prophet's voice. The oracles of God were cherished as the most precious treasure ever bestowed upon a nation, but the divinely inspired foreteller was, at best, only a proud tradition. Time was when the favored nation received instruction and guidance from one especially commissioned as the representative of its invisible but divine king ; but now the devout men of Israel mourned that the function of the prophet had so long remained in abeyance.

No wonder, then, that the people, with a true instinct, recognized the royal representative, and, in defiance of the arguments and authority of the scribes, welcomed John when he manifested a prophet's contempt for the proud usurpers of the throne and the priesthood, and spoke with a prophet's authority and a prophet's convincing directness. In the universal acknowledgment which this unique, unheralded, and seemingly unauthorized man at once secured, the voice of the people was, indeed, the voice of God.

Though John was the last of his line, and with him the law and the prophets expired (Luke xvi, 16), he enjoyed the peculiar distinction of being the only prophet whose coming and whose official work were themselves of old the subject of prophecy. Isa. xl, 3 ; Mal. iv, 5 ; Matt. iii, 3. Nearly all his predecessors



had, in utterances more or less explicit, proclaimed the coming of the Bridegroom, but for him was reserved the signal honor of being chosen as the friend of the Bridegroom, to listen to the living Bridegroom's voice.

It would not be very easy for us to understand and explain the full character of John's work as the foreteller and forerunner of our Lord, neither can we presume to estimate its full value in the development of the divine purpose; but we have an illustration of it in the fearless blow which, at the very beginning of his public activity, he struck at the false national idea of the coming Messiah's kingdom. With startling clearness of expression he prepared all sincere and devoutly inquiring minds for a just conception of a Messianic kingdom in full harmony with divine promise and prophesy.

It was a long time from the advent of John to the day of Pentecost, and the herald may have been as ignorant of the full nature and scope of the new kingdom as were the apostles themselves before the enlightening power of the Holy Spirit fell upon them. But the rubbish was to be cleared away, and the ground prepared for the coming of the Master-Builder to set in place the foundation stones of the true temple of God among men. As to the nature of this preliminary work John was thoroughly informed. With a prophet's clear eye he saw, and with a prophet's resistless authority he proclaimed,

that all worship of Satan in the exaltation of national pride and power must cease.\* In the new kingdom force and fraud and selfishness and insincerity and the spirit of caste must be outlawed. Sham piety must be branded as high treason, and purity of heart proclaimed the one essential qualification for either citizenship or leadership. Hence Pharisees must give place to fishermen, repentant publicans, and true Israelites. Matt. ix, 9; iii, 7; iv, 21, 22; John i, 43-51. The accident of birth, the inheritance of an honored name, or success in mounting to a high place among men, can give no claim to consideration. Matt. iii, 9. To confess and give up sin, to be clothed in humility, to deal justly and charitably with all men, and to be sincere toward God, these qualities, and these alone, can make one a prince where all are princes, and glad to serve where all are servants. Rev. i, 6; v, 10; Matt. xx, 27.

Says Newman Smyth: "The great doctrines of the Bible are vividly revealed through its characters and their work, and in the progress of the whole history. In this book for all peoples and ages the most abstract and impalpable truths seem taken, as it were, from the very air, from distant realms of the spirit, and clothed with flesh and blood; they are revealed walking with men, dwelling in their homes, made concrete and visible in the person of patriarch, prophet, apostle; and they are summed up and

\* Matt. iv, 9; *Ecce Homo*. pp. 20-23.

declared, in the vernacular of every man's heart, in the Word made flesh." \* With a prophet's fidelity to fundamental truth, John especially emphasized repentance, and in this more than any thing else we have the warrant for his coming.

In dress, in mode of life, in fiery eloquence, in fearlessness, in almost contemptuous disregard of conventionalisms, in passionate vehemence of purpose, in that directness of appeal which is only inspired by a great heart burdened with a sense of great need, and in the overmastering immediateness of his call, John was, indeed, the very personification of repentance. He stands in human history as the startling embodiment of this grace. He has so vitalized a great truth as to be forever identified with it. At the very portal of the kingdom of God among men forever stands this chosen one of God to keep watch and ward over its first great principle: his voice a trumpet call, his word a command, and his testimony a perpetual inspiration to righteousness.

His ministry, introducing and running into that of Christ, made both complete. Jesus had no sins of his own to mourn over, no tendency to sin to subdue, no tyrannical passions to wrestle down, no bad habits to put away. It was, therefore, impossible for him to illustrate in his own person and life the grace of repentance. He could teach repentance by precept, but not by practice. The proclamation of the new

\* *Old Faiths in New Light*, p. 37.

Gospel was, therefore, complete because Jesus could point to his forerunner, who, with the consciousness of personal need and the clear vision of an inspired seer, set before men, by eloquent word and holy deed as well, this initial virtue of the Christian life. John and Jesus, the sinner and the sinless One, the prophet and the High-priest of the new dispensation, together give us the only adequate portraiture of Christian character from its inception to its full form and perfect finish.

John's work was short and of a transitional character, but his influence is as permanent as the great movement he so successfully inaugurated. Measured by the immense moral power it exercised, his ministry was most complete and satisfactory. In the immediate effects of his preaching, and in the results which followed, the greatness of which is attested in each of the four Gospels, he accomplished all that he could have either desired or expected. Jesus classed him among the very greatest of the prophets. Matt. xi, 9-11. The arrogant Pharisees did not accept his doctrines, although they were spell-bound by his eloquence and attempted no defense against his reproofs; but the people accepted both him and his teachings with unquestioning faith and passionate devotion. Mark xi, 30-32. The national heart and conscience were in sympathy with him in his daring revolt against the ritualism of the priests and the legalism of the scribes. Says Fairbairn: "The priest and the scribe

had made the people of God the people of form and privilege; the prophet appears that he may command the people of form and privilege to become the people of God. National was possible only through individual regeneration. The mass could be made holy only by the units becoming holy. And the change must be immediate. The God who had borne so long with their evil would bear no longer. (The kingdom of heaven was at hand; its dawn stood tip-toe on the mountain-top. And the king was a judge, coming to do his own will, not the will of the Jews. He was coming, fan in hand, to divide the chaff from the wheat, to gather the one into his garner, to burn up the other with unquenchable fire. John's spirit was thus essentially ethical, and his attitude one of essential antagonism to the unethical spirit of Judaism. He evoked from the Old Testament the spirit that inaugurated the New, and so became the meeting-point of both, a symbol of the dawn, which is at once the death of the night and the birth of the day. So the man and his mission must be studied if the Christ is to be understood."\*

But John was more than a prophet, and greater than any other of his order, illustrious as some of them had been. For this estimate we have the highest possible authority in the statement of Christ himself, who, when John's messengers to him had departed, turned to the multitude, and said concerning

\* *Studies in the Life of Christ*, pp. 67, 72.



the Baptist: ("What went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee.") Matt. xi, 9, 10; Mal. iii, 1. John was more than a prophet because he not only foretold the coming of the Messiah but was his actual precursor.

All the prophets of the old period prophesied of the new era, and some of them predicted its character, and even designated its time; but no one of them was permitted to usher it into existence. This signal honor was reserved for John, who, "as preparing the way for the Messiah, represented the highest perfection of the old covenant." It is as though Christ had said: "You have looked upon one of the greatest of men; greater than Elijah, or Isaiah, or Malachi, whose prophetic words I have just quoted; as great as Moses, or Samuel, or David; but you do not, because you cannot, fully understand his character."

John was more than a prophet because, like Moses, he stood in very intimate relations with the manifested God, who spake to him not in a "vision" or a "dream," but "mouth to mouth," without any mediation or reserve, and he saw the "similitude [or human form] of the Lord." Num. xii, 1-10; Exod. xxxiii, 11; Deut. xxxiv, 10.

He was more than a prophet by virtue of a special

fact which is most tersely set forth by Dr. William Hanna: "Of the greatest of his predecessors, of Moses, of Elijah, of Daniel, it was true that they filled but a limited space in the great dispensation with which they were connected; their days but a handbreadth in the broad cycle of events with which their lives and labors were wrapped up, the individuality of each, if not lost among, yet linked with, that of a multitude of compeers. But John presents himself alone. The prophet of the desert, the forerunner of the Lord, appears without a coadjutor, a whole distinct economy in himself. To announce Christ's advent, to break up the way before him, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord, this was the specific object of that economy which began and ended in John's ministry."

Jesus sets a higher value upon John than on a mere prophet, because he not only had the prophetic vision, but the stronger, grander mission which is found in actual contact with the great moral duties and brave participation in the great moral battles of life. The seer had his place, and it was an important one; but John came to usher in a period which was to witness the greatest of all conflicts, in which men of deeds were to be of far greater value than men of visions, and he was a most worthy model for all such. He was the very foremost of that mighty line of moral heroes who, fully comprehending the significance of the conflict in which they were en-

gaged, were to take the kingdom of heaven as if by force.\*

The character of John has an additional interest and value from the fact that he is exhibited to us in the New Testament as a priest. He belonged to that particular line of the descendants of Levi to which the priestly functions were, by divine ordination, restricted. To be sure, we never find him directing, or even assisting in, the temple service, yet it is very clear that the well-known fact of his belonging to the priestly class gave him a peculiar power over the people, especially in his denunciations of wrong and his vehement warnings against divine wrath.

He must have been regarded as an authorized teacher, and this explains the reverent spirit with which the people received his instructions and his reproofs. None but a priest could have effectively, or even safely, spoken as he did against the perversions of Scripture, the desecration of sacred office, the pernicious ritualism, and the willful abuse of authority which characterized the religious leaders of the nation. None but a priest could have so effectively pointed out the religious errors of the day, and the gross national misconception of a true theocratic kingdom. Like Jeremiah and Ezekiel, he had been selected from the priestly order to fill the higher office of prophet, and this fact no doubt gave special energy to his utterances. He felt that he spake with

\* See Lange on Matt. xi. 12.



a double authority, and had a double claim to be respectfully heard.

Like all the best of his line, his mind was especially alive to the transcendent importance of the great truths he was called to teach. The nation had been led astray by the priestly class, and now, as a representative of that class, divinely ordained to rectify its mistakes, he felt impelled, against all opposition, at all cost of personal ease, popularity, or even safety, to zealously devote every energy to the task of convincing his countrymen of their danger and leading them to the one way of escape.

There was a striking similarity between John's character and the true nature of the priestly office. His most prominent moral qualities were a thorough knowledge of sin, a dominating conviction that penitence and moral regeneration were the crying need of the times, and a passionate love of sincerity and true righteousness. So far as character and motive are concerned, John was an ideal priest.

And then he was a true representative of the people. All that he said or did was in their name, and with a most stubborn fidelity to their interests. Hence he took upon himself the duty of rebuking, in most impassioned terms, their tendency to think that the priests could not only perform certain official services as their representatives, but could as well do all their praying and repenting and serving God for them; and he spared no pains to impress upon their

minds and hearts the essential fact that each man must repent and pray, and "bring forth fruits meet for repentance" for himself. With great care he taught the people that while the priests were in a very important sense their representatives they were not such in the sense of relieving them from the most solemn and inevitable personal moral responsibilities. Thus most effectually he prepared them for the speedy doing away altogether of the glory and office of the Aaronic priesthood, and the establishment of the new kingdom, with its new and more perfect economy, in which all true believers are citizens with equal rank and rights, and are proclaimed a "royal priesthood," offering themselves as "living sacrifices, holy, acceptable unto God," as becometh those who are exalted to be "kings and priests unto God and his Father." 1 Pet. ii, 5-9; Rom. xii, 10; Rev. i, 6.

John's courage was like a divine inspiration, and therefore indomitable. He dared to set himself in opposition to a whole nation. He denounced the guilty passion and unholy ambition of a prince who held over him the power of life and death, and rebuked the extortions of a rich tax-gatherer, as promptly and as fiercely as he proclaimed the wrath of God against sinners of lesser note or influence. In his fearlessness he knew neither race, position, power, nor precedent. With him to recognize the presence of wrong was to instantly and with all his might an-

tagonize it. It is not, therefore, marvelous that from the very first he was successful.

Every man who had a spark of honor or manliness glowing within him admired such lofty fidelity to principle, such utter forgetfulness of self in a passionate effort to promote the well-being of others. The dangers and severe discipline of his desert life had well fitted him for this peculiar mission. "What to him," asks the eloquent Edward Irving, "was a scowling Pharisee, or a mocking Sadducee, or a fawning publican, or a rough soldier, or a riotous mob? These were jocund, cheerful sights to one who had roamed among the wild beasts of the desert, and in the midst of them laid down his head under no canopy and with no defense but the canopy and defense of the providence of the Most High. Around a man who can despise accommodations and conveniences, and deal with nature in ancient simplicity and independence, and move among her social and religious institutions like a traveler from another world, free to judge and censure and approve, as having nothing himself at stake—around such a man there is a moral grandeur and authority to which none but the narrowest and most bigoted minds will refuse a certain awe and reverence. And when such a personage assumes to himself divine commission, and publishes new truth with divine authority, and rebukes all wickedness, and scorns all consequences, he takes, by the natural right of the wiser, the bolder, and the

better man, a high place above those who feel themselves enslaved and enshackled by customs which they despise." \*

John's lofty humility was a fit companion virtue to his courage, for in the exercise of both he retired before a greater Prophet and a greater Priest with a simple dignity which made his proud confession, that he had lived to be superseded, the most impressively eloquent of all his utterances.

As the herald of the new kingdom, John was the first leader of the people to rise above the mean ideas of race which every-where prevailed among his countrymen. The Jews not only thought their religion was the best, and looked with contempt upon all foreign gods, but they regarded the religion of the true God as their exclusive heritage. The Hebrew religion was solely for the Hebrew nation. Though there might have been now and then a proselyte to the Hebrew faith from among less favored peoples, still it never entered the Hebrew mind that any other nation or nations ought to be, or could be, converted to a worship instituted for the especial enlightenment and salvation of the elect sons of Abraham. But John, although he did not reach the broad catholicity of the great apostle to the Gentiles, in his preaching and in his baptism made no narrow distinctions. Publicans and sinners, as well as scribes and Pharisees; Roman soldiers from the camp and

\* Edward Irving's Works, iii, 21, 41.

Arabs from the desert, as well as priests from the temple and courtiers from the palace of Herod, were all alike exhorted to repentance, and formally accepted as believers in the King and kingdom to come.

So, through the unique liberality of this bold herald, a new light dawned on the national mind, in the idea that a perfect religion is superior to country, to caste, to blood, and to laws. X

Joined to his catholicity was a most wonderful self-abnegation. Like Moses, he entirely forgot himself and his unbounded opportunities for personal exaltation as a magnetic leader of men in his consuming zeal for the welfare of the people. He preferred the crown of martyrdom to the crown of authority, if thereby he could best exalt the truth and save the nation. He never once referred to his own claims. His whole thought and anxiety seemed to be of his message, and how best to persuade men to heed it. He was simply the agent, the "voice;" but the word uttered was of God, and demanded instant faith and obedience. To the oft-repeated questions, What art thou? Who art thou? he promptly replied: "What or who I am is of no importance, but the salvation of the nation depends upon heeding what I say." In the exercise of this virtue he unconsciously assumed the attitude where he not only was the most effective as a messenger, but where his own greatness appeared to the best advantage. By this he became insensible



to the strength of any and all opposing forces, never once thought of a possible defeat, and was content to be forgotten, or to die, since the greater One and the greater cause were sure, in the end, to triumph.

At last the day came when a solemn stillness fell upon the banks of the Jordan and the mountains of Judea. The great preacher had disappeared. His trumpet voice, with its deep tone of purest wisdom, was heard no more. Men looked in vain for his majestic presence. If not in the end victorious, he was sublimely invincible. He had grappled in a life-or-death struggle with the spirit of the times, and who shall dare to say he was not triumphant?

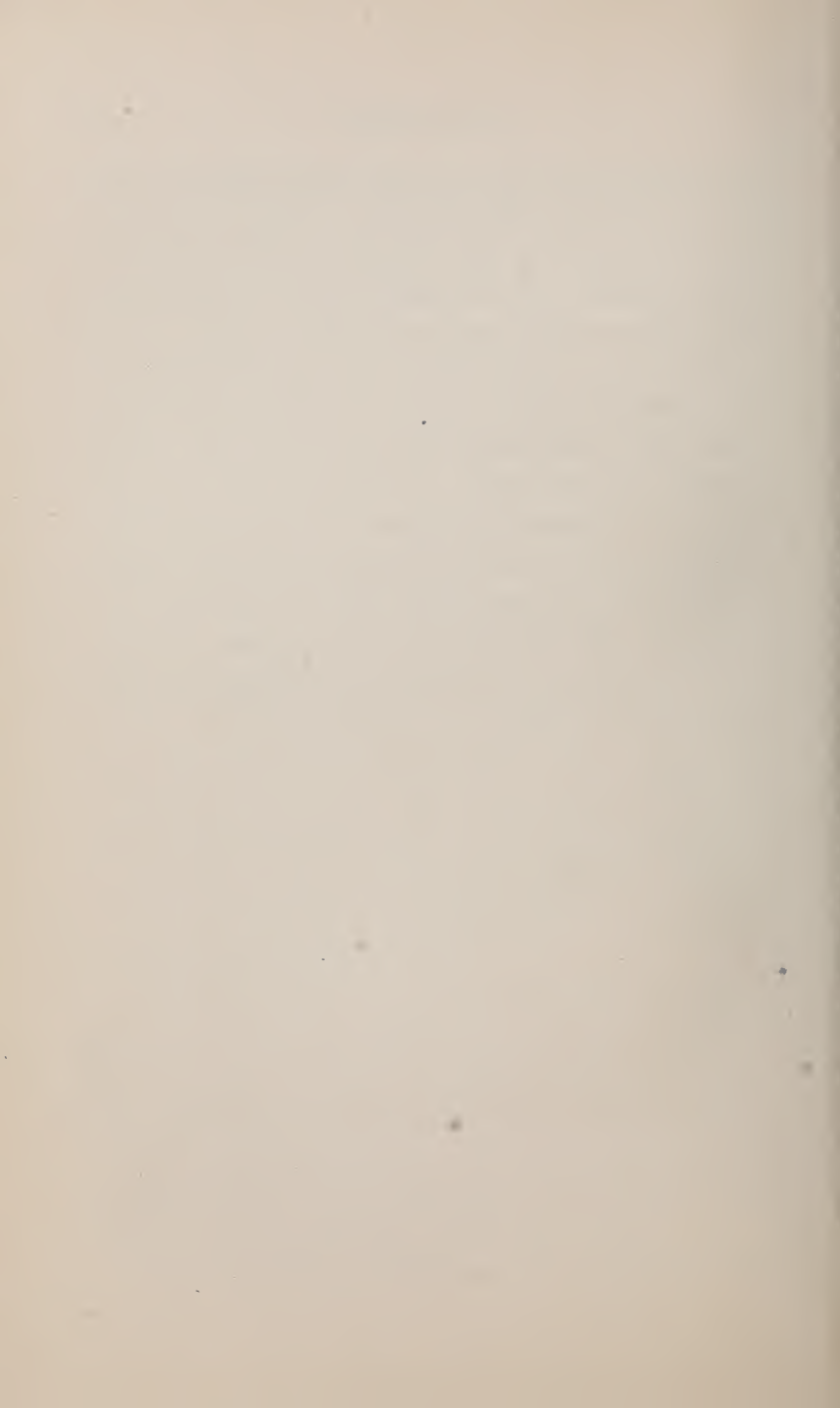
The great heart that beat in unison with all human needs and right desires was stilled. The strong but weary man was at rest. No human being ever more richly deserved honor of men and angels than John; for he had, so far as his limitations would permit, finished his work and done his full part for his countrymen as well as for his God.

The new era had been gloriously ushered in. Jesus was now the central figure, and, turning to review the field, he withheld not honor where honor was due, but frankly said of John the Baptist, his chosen and trustworthy forerunner: "He was a burning and a shining light!" Whedon says: "Some lights are shining, but not burning. John was both."

One of the dukes of Lüneburg caused the figure of

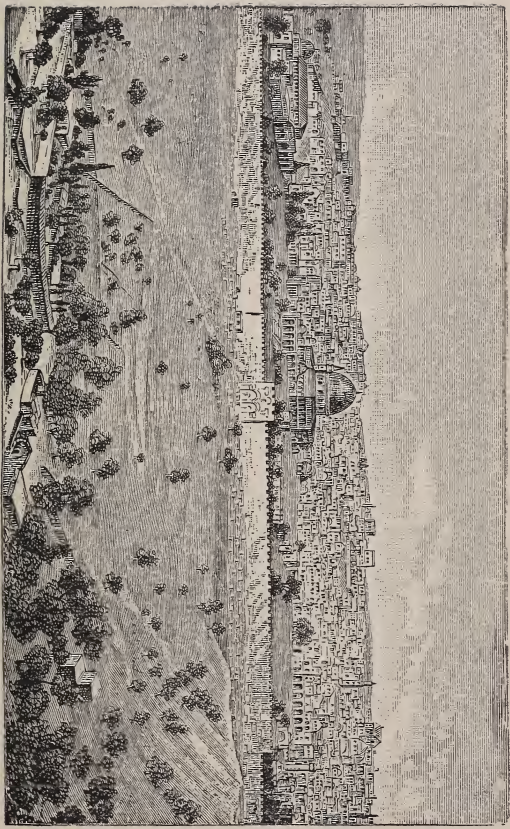
a burning lamp to be stamped upon his coin, with this inscription: "Ministering to others, I consume myself." So John was all aglow with the fire of a wise and holy zeal. Burning, he was consumed in the people's service, and for the Master's glory.

Some who "were willing for a season to rejoice in his light" (John v, 35) as mere sensation-lovers rather than truth-lovers, when the excitement of the moment and the charm of the preacher's voice had departed, deliberately rejected his testimony and rejected Christ. But in the hearts of many honest admirers his eloquent words and inspiring influence remained. The divine leaven was at work. The divine kingdom had come, and John was justified in all his works and words.





Jerusalem.





# JOHN THE BAPTIST.

---

## CHAPTER I.

### THE ANNOUNCEMENT.

A. U. C. 748 or 749.

LUKE the evangelist, evidently translating from an Aramaic oral narration, or perhaps document,\* gives us the only account of John's birth and the peculiar circumstances which attended that event. For four hundred years preceding this narrative God had not spoken to his people in vision or by miracle. Malachi had closed the old canon with the prediction that Elijah should be the immediate herald of the Christ, and now the first record of the new canon is the announcement of the true Elijah's advent. Light once more, and suddenly, shines out of darkness. Down-trodden Israel again lifts up her head; Jerusalem is once more the chief city of the earth, and the glory of the latter temple eclipses that of the former.† Hag. ii, 6-9.

At this eventful period Herod, miscalled the Great,

\* Alford on Luke i, 5.

† See page 31.

was king of Judea. He was the son of Antipater, a distinguished Idumean general, who, by his own bravery and the favor of the Romans, had obtained supreme power over his native Idumea.\*

When but twenty-five years of age, Herod was appointed by his father governor of Galilee, where he immediately became a favorite with the people because of his brilliant achievements as a soldier and his skill in managing the affairs of that province.† By the further development of these qualities he afterward became king of Judea, a term which embraced all Palestine, with Jerusalem for his new capital.‡

Herod the Great married ten wives, by five of whom there was posterity. By his wife Malthace, a Samaritan woman, he had two sons, Archelaus and Antipas, the latter of whom became tetrarch of Galilee, and plays a most important part further on in our narrative. During his eventful reign Herod expended vast sums of money in rebuilding the temple in more than its former magnificence, erecting gorgeous palaces, and otherwise adding to the splendor of his capital city. Though possessed of some admirable qualities, his chief characteristic was a selfish ambition which made him tyrannical, unscrupulous, and unhesitating in the commission of

\* Josephus, *Antiq.*, xiv, 1, 3; *Wars of the Jews*, i, 8, 9.

† Josephus, *Antiq.*, xiv, 9, 2. and footnote, Whiston's translation.

‡ Josephus, *Antiq.*, xiv, chapters 14, 15, 16.

any crime which promised to further his desires. As old age approached, and some of his most cherished plans miscarried, he became suspicious, cruel, and extremely blood-thirsty, sparing not even his own household in his insane rage. He put to death Mariamne, his most beautiful and celebrated wife, with his two sons by her, young men who were the innocent and accomplished favorites of the entire nation. Just five days before his own death he sent to execution his son Antipas. As this monster of iniquity, great only in crime, saw his end approaching, he caused the arrest of a large number of the most illustrious citizens, and decreed that as soon as he had breathed his last they should all be beheaded, in order, as he said, that there might be mourning throughout the land at his death. "But a dead tyrant possesses little authority, and, of course, his barbarous order was never executed." \*

Luke spends no time upon the reign of Herod, but simply refers to it as a chronological introduction to a much more important event in history. Our attention is at once turned away from the splendid debauchery of a notoriously wicked court to the humble affairs of a family in semi-private life; a family whose name is to be ever blessed, as Herod's is ever cursed.

The temple seems at this time to have been under the control of a lifeless and even hypocritical priest-

\* Josephus, *Antiq.*, Books xv, xvi, xvii.

hood. The prophetic spirit had been long silent; but now that God was about to speak once more to the world he knew how to find and honor the one member of this corrupt body who was still fit for his use. In perfect harmony with the spirit of the old theocracy, a priest was chosen to proclaim the immediate coming of the world's Messiah, and a priest's son was ordained not only to close the long line of Messianic prophets, but to inaugurate that series of wonderful events which culminated in Calvary, and Pentecost, and the historic Church of Christ.

Zacharias was of the tribe of Levi, on which the office of the priesthood was entailed. He has been supposed to have been the high-priest, but of this there is no proof beyond the altogether insufficient testimony of the apocryphal New Testament.\* His name signifies "The Lord remembers," a meaning which was marvelously exemplified in the events now to be considered. His wife was Elisabeth, of the family of Aaron, and thus, with her husband, belonged to the priestly rank, which was the most honorable nobility among the Jews, for Josephus says: "As among different nations there are different sorts of nobility, so with us the sharing of the priesthood is token of illustrious rank." Notwithstanding the degeneracy of the times we are not surprised to be told that Zacharias and Elisabeth "were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments

\* The Protevangelion, ix, 5.



and ordinances of the Lord blameless," for God's heroes have always been born of worthy parents, carefully selected and trained for the duties of their important office.

When King David made his preparations for building the first temple he divided the numerous descendants of Aaron, who were exclusively called to the service of the sanctuary, into twenty-four classes or orders, each of which ministered in the temple during a week. 1 Chron. xxiv. The descendants of Eleazar, Aaron's elder son, formed sixteen of these classes or courses; those of Ithamar, the younger son, only eight, that of Abijah being the eighth. 1 Chron. xxiv, 10. From the days of Solomon these twenty-four courses relieved each other weekly in the temple service. On the return from the captivity but four courses were left, which were again divided into twenty-four.\* Ezra ii, 36-39; vi, 18 The course of Abijah, being the eighth, it has been calculated, officiated April 17-23, and October 3-9.

Nothing was left to chance in the service of the sanctuary. The priests for each day in the week were selected from the class by lot. The lot also determined who was to perform each separate portion of the sacred service, and especially who was each morning and evening to burn incense before the Lord, for this office was considered the most important and honorable of all. In this instance the lot

\* Josephus, *Antiq.*, vii, 14, 7.

fell on Zacharias. It was probably the Sabbath, at the hour when all the congregation attended at the temple in the court of Israel and the court of the women, in front of the great altar on which the bleeding lamb was placed. In the holy place of the temple were the golden table of showbread, the golden candlestick with its seven lamps, in allusion to the seven planets,\* and the altar of incense in the center.

Zacharias's associate supervised the sacrifice on the great altar of burnt-offerings without, while Zacharias himself, at a certain signal, came forth clad in his white sacerdotal robes, with covered head and naked feet, and, taking fire from the altar of sacrifice, he entered the holy place and laid it within the golden altar of incense. In the golden cup, called the censer, above the burning coals, he placed the fragrant gum especially prepared for the purpose (Exod. xxx, 34-38) (which the Jews were forbidden to compound for private use), and soon the still air of the sanctuary was filled with wreaths of smoke, typifying the acceptable prayers of devout souls, at this hour, not only in the courts without, but in every part of the land. Psalm cxli, 2; Rev. v, 8; viii, 3, 4.

It was a most impressive place and moment. Mixed emotions of awe and exalted delight filled his pious soul as he poured out a fervent supplication for Israel before the Jehovah whose manifest presence once filled with glory the holy of holies. His official but

\* Josephus, *Antiq.*, iii, 6, 7.

cherished duty performed, he was about to leave the temple when the sacred silence was broken by the rustling of a celestial wing, and the old power of God's covenant grace was once more manifested to the anointed priest of Israel by the appearance of the angel Gabriel standing upon the right hand of the altar of incense, a position which in itself was a good omen for Zacharias. Mark xvi, 5; Acts vii, 55. Centuries had elapsed since such a celestial form had been seen in Israel, and although Zacharias, in common with all devout Jews, was waiting for and expecting the manifestation of God, still he was startled and troubled by what he saw, and he even trembled with fear as he reverently awaited the pleasure of his heavenly visitant. He had not long to wait, for soon the soft, sweet accents of Gabriel's voice were heard in the "Fear not, Zacharias," which sounded the keynote of the new dispensation. Luke ii, 10. The days of stately ceremonies and the worship of fear were ended, and a new morning of light and love had dawned upon the world. He that was afar off in the law was now to be brought nigh in the Gospel. The echoes of Sinai's thunders were to give place to the tender, loving accents of One who spake as never man spake. John vii, 46.

With such a man as Zacharias there could be no doubt as to the reality of what he now saw and heard, for to a devout Hebrew of that day there could be no more sacred, consistent, or welcome miracle than

that of an angelic visitation. In the history of his race he would recall the readiness with which the glorious heavenly messengers talked with the primitive pair in Eden ; or sought the hospitality of Abraham's tent, leaving an abundant recompense for their shelter and food in the hope with which they filled the patriarch's heart ; or waited upon the visions and footsteps of Jacob ; or imparted wisdom and strength to Moses and the long line of faithful men who ruled the people in the fear of God. Nothing more reasonable than to believe that this manner of direct communication between the heavenly and the earthly life, though now for a long time unknown, would some day be revived. Such was the faith of Zacharias, particularly touching any revelations to the national leaders concerning the expected Messiah. He could not, therefore, be surprised by the coming of the angel, but only trembled that the divine messenger should be sent to him. Of this angelic visitation Dr. J. J. Van Oosterzee justly says : " So many traces of divine wisdom are apparent in the narrative that skepticism itself has no exceptions to make, but to its miraculous character. In this case the appearance of an angel is especially offensive to the tastes and notions of modern criticism. This being the first account of the kind which we meet with in Luke's gospel, we may be allowed the following remarks. The existence of a higher world of spirits can as little be proved as denied by any *a priori* reasoning ; ex-

perience and history can alone decide the point. Now it is certain, on purely historical and critical grounds, that angels have been both seen and heard by well-known and credible individuals; and if this be so a higher world of spirits must exist. It has, indeed, been said (by Schleiermacher) that belief in the existence of angels has no necessary basis and support in the religious self-consciousness (or subjective experience) of the believer; but the question here is merely concerning the historical truth of biblical angelology, and not concerning the subjective experience it produces.\* Angels are not merely transient emanations, and effulgences of the divine essence (Olshausen); but personal, conscious, holy beings, related, like men, to the Father of spirits. God, being the supreme and absolute Spirit, is able to employ such *λειτουργικὰ πνεύματα* in his service; and man, having received a spiritual element from God, cannot lack the ability of perceiving, with an enlightened eye, the appearance of beings so nearly related to himself. It is not when the bodily eye has been directed to the material world, but when a higher and more spiritual organ has been developed, and the ear opened to the voice of God, in the hours of prayer and solitude, that angelic appearances have been perceived. This power of perception, pro-

\* It should not be inferred from the text that Schleiermacher denied the existence of angels altogether. He only denied the existence of Satan and the *evil* angels.—*Philip Schaff, D.D.*



duced by God himself, must be distinguished from the trance or vision, properly so called, wherein angels have sometimes, but by no means always, been perceived. Compare Acts x, 10; 2 Cor. xii, 1, *ff*. The angelic apparitions were by no means the fruit of an overstrained imagination, but objective revelations of God, by means of personal spirits; yet only capable of being received under certain subjective conditions.”\*

A Scottish divine has eloquently said in regard to the angel Gabriel’s appearance to Mary, and the various other angelic appearances in connection with the life and death of our Lord: “Is there aught incredible in this? If there be indeed a world of spirits, and in that world Christ fills the place our faith attributes to him; if in that world there be an innumerable company of angels; if the great design of our Lord’s visit to this earth was to redeem our sinful race to God, and unite us with the unfallen members of his great family—then it was not unnatural that those who had worshiped around his throne should bend in wonder over his cradle, stand by his side in his deep agony, roll away the stone rejoicing from his sepulcher, and attend him as the everlasting doors were lifted up, when, triumphant over death and hell, he resumed his place on the eternal throne. When the Father brought his first begotten into the world, the edict was, ‘Let all the angels of God worship him.’ Shall we wonder, then, that this worship, in

\* Commentary on Luke.



one or two of its acts, should be made manifest to human vision, as if to tell us what an interest the Incarnation excited, if not in the minds of men, in another and higher branch of the great community of spirits? . . . It was the Son of God who brought these good angels down along with him. He has mediated not only between us and the Father, but between us and that elder branch of the great commonwealth of spirits, securing their services for us here, preparing us for their society hereafter. He has taught them to see in us that seed out of which the places made vacant by the first revolt in heaven are to be filled. He has taught us to see in them our elder brethren, to a closer and eternal fellowship with whom we are hereafter to be elevated. Already the interchange of kindly offices has commenced. Though since he himself has gone they have withdrawn from human vision, they have not withdrawn from earthly service under the Redeemer. Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister to them who shall be heirs of salvation? Who shall recount to us wherein that gracious ministry of theirs consists? Who shall prove it to be a fancy, that as they waited to bear away the spirit of Lazarus to Abram's bosom they hover round the death-bed of the believer still, the tread of their footstep, the stroke of their wing unheard as they waft the departing spirit to its eternal home?" \*

\* *Hanna's Life of Our Lord.*

In sympathy with the anxiety expressed in the countenance of the godly priest, Gabriel hastened to satisfy his awed but questioning soul :

“ Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard;  
And thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son,  
And thou shalt call his name John.  
And thou shalt have joy and gladness;  
And many shall rejoice at his birth.  
For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord,  
And shall drink neither wine nor strong drink;  
And he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother’s womb,  
And many of the children of Israel shall be turned to the Lord their God.  
And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias,  
To turn the hearts of the parents to the children,  
And the disobedient to the wisdom of the just;  
To make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” Luke i, 13-17.

Thus Gabriel poured out the rich treasures of his heavenly message, in the beautiful and stately address, breathing the very spirit of the Old Testament writings, and in exact accord with the thought and life of a consecrated priest of the Most High God.

The great sorrow which rested upon the otherwise happy life of Zacharias and Elisabeth was well known. They had no son to comfort their old age, and to perpetuate their name and memory. They had been taught by their religion, and by the precepts common to all Oriental society, that children, and especially sons, were the greatest blessings which could be bestowed by the gracious providence of God; and that

the lack of them was an almost unmitigated calamity. Rachel's words, "Give me children, or else I die" (Gen. xxx, 1), were upon the lips of every childless woman in Israel. Only by the birth of a child could the reproach of such be removed. Such an event was a warrant that the name of the father should not cease from among his brethren. Eastern nations generally seem to have always had this feeling, and it is still so strong among them that after the birth of a first-born son a father and a mother are no longer known by their own names, but as the father and mother of the child. "The new name thus adopted (for example, 'father or mother of John') is used not only in common parlance, but also on the gravest occasions, and even in legal documents." \*

Their childlessness was, therefore, a great trial of the faith of Zacharias and Elisabeth. But they were both righteous before God, and they humbly bowed to his will as not only supreme, but best. They had prayed often and fervently that this stigma upon their otherwise honorable name might be removed, that their friends might no longer regard them as living under the direct displeasure of the Almighty (Gen. xx, 18; Hos. ix, 14; Jer. xxix, 32; xxxv, 19); but they had never doubted God's love, and had never murmured against his providence. If they had ever cherished a hope of the great blessing they seemed

\* Mill's *Nablus*, 119.

now to have calmly resigned it, and, in the decline of life, happy in each other's faithful love, they were quietly and sweetly awaiting God's pleasure, while they trusted in the wisdom of his eternal purposes. The prayer of Zacharias, the priest, was now no longer for a posterity, that his name might not die in Israel, but, with every morning and evening sacrifice, his supplication was poured into the ear of the God who loved him for the "consolation of Israel." Not only in domestic and secret worship, but as a priest officiating in the holy place, he did not limit his petitions to mere personal requests, but his thoughts turned toward Jehovah's promises to his broken and despised people, and his soul went out in an agony of prayer for the coming of the Messiah, who alone could restore the lost glory of the temple and the faded splendor of David's throne. Often did he cry, in the words of the psalmist, which voiced the most cherished desire of his loyal soul, "O that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion." Psa. xiv, 7. Such fidelity was rare in that degenerate age, and God did not fail to hear and honor his servant. A twofold promise now falls upon his eager ear, and is engraved upon his thankful heart. Not only shall the long-looked-for Messiah appear in his day, but he shall himself be the happy father of that Messiah's forerunner; an honor which far surpasses the hopes of his most ecstatic visions. Zacharias indeed sought first "the kingdom of God and his righteousness," and, behold, all other

things, even the earthly joy of a father, were added to him. Matt. vi, 33.

The name of this son, divinely given in answer to prayer as well as in fulfillment of ancient prophecy, is to be John, which signifies *God given*, or *God is gracious*. It is clearly intimated that he will not be honored of men, or occupy an exalted place in society, but, as becomes the precursor of the meek and lowly Nazarene, he will move in a humble sphere. Still, he is to be great in the sight of the Lord, and, therefore, really great; for, as Thomas à Kempis says, "What thou art in the sight of God, that thou truly art."

He is to be temperate, and even abstemious, as indicative of his separateness unto the Lord, and is to be filled with the Holy Spirit from his very birth, as one sent into the world for a special holy purpose. The proof of this shall be in his strange power as a reformer working in a corrupt age and amongst a degenerate people, turning men on every hand to repentance and righteousness. Such a manifest spirit and power shall rest upon him as shall make the people think indeed that Elijah, the romantic but mighty prophet of Ahab's day, has returned again to the earth. Thus in a literal fulfillment of prophecy a notable reformation shall break forth in degenerate Israel, and a reconciliation shall take place between the holy spirit of the olden time and the apostate present. Old Israel and new Israel shall clasp hands



across the middle ages of idolatry, hypocrisy, ignorance, and sin ; and so perfect at last shall be the reign of holiness and love that even the Gentiles shall rejoice in its saving power.

Zacharias was a holy man, but his powers of faith were weakened by his adverse surroundings, and, for a moment, he did not credit the heavenly promise either in his head or his heart ; but forgetting the past power and glory of Israel's God, and unconvinced even by the splendor and supernatural knowledge of his angelic visitant, he asked for a sign or a proof that the wonderful announcement was really of God. The very greatness of God's goodness seems to have stunned his spiritual faculties. He had borne faithfully and blamelessly the burdens and disappointments of his long life of toil ; he had not murmured when the shadows fell upon his path or the clouds gathered above his head ; and yet, for the moment, he could not open his heart to the full sunshine of God's loving favor.

Faith was to be the chief condition of the new covenant, the key-note of the new Gospel ; therefore it was needful that this early though characteristic exhibition of unbelief be rebuked, and even punished. The aged priest's temporary doubts were not permitted to frustrate even the slightest purpose of heaven, or to divert the divine mercy from its appointed channel. His fault was not a great one. God, who looked upon his heart, saw the purity of all



his motives, and the penalty inflicted was, therefore, slight. It was not so much a punishment as a means of discipline.

Prompt and startling came the answer to his doubt: "I am Gabriel," said the angel. "I stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to show thee these glad tidings." This was an answer befitting the dignity of the archangel, and yet perfectly intelligible to a well-instructed priest, who at once recalled the heavenly messenger sent to the prophet Daniel (Dan. viii, 16; ix, 21), and recognized him as one deep in the counsels of the Godhead.

"And, behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season."

Since the word rendered *speechless* in Luke i, 22, signifies both deaf and dumb, we know that the ear which refused the angel's message was now closed, and the tongue which ventured to speak the language of doubt and suspicion was forced to temporary silence; and this not alone as a proof of the divine presence and power, but as a token of the divine displeasure. Like halting Jacob, Zacharias was not only to be made familiar with the severe side of a heavenly visitation, but he was permitted to rejoice in its side of gracious blessing. God, through the affliction so patiently borne, at once reproved his servant's fault and revealed to him his own name and nature, which

is love. The trial became a sign to Zacharias and to others that the hope of Israel was drawing nigh.

During this remarkable scene in the holy place, the people in the courts without were waiting to receive the priestly blessing before they dispersed to their homes. It not being customary for the priest to remain so long in the sanctuary, they feared that some misfortune had befallen him, as a sign of the divine displeasure for the improper performance of the sacred service, and therefore were not so much astonished at his strange appearance when he at last came forth. When they perceived that he was dumb, and marked the strange awe-struck look upon his face, they naturally supposed that it was the result of an angelic appearance, a supposition that was at once confirmed by the priest in the language of signs. Says Beecher: "We have no certainty whether this scene occurred at a morning or an evening service, but it is supposed to have been at the evening sacrifice. In that case the event was an impressive symbol. The people beheld their priest standing against the setting sun, dumb, while they dispersed in the twilight, the shadow of the temple having already fallen upon them. The old was passing into darkness; to-morrow another sun must rise!" \*

The divine communication which he received in the temple Zacharias was compelled to carry in silence, a treasure too sacred to be committed to un-

\* *The Life of Jesus the Christ*, vol. i, p. 14.

holy hands. His great desire now was to reach his temporary home in the city, and reveal the secret to his faithful Elisabeth. As soon as the remaining days of his week of service were passed, they hastened to their residence in the hill-country of Judea, where the aged couple rejoiced together in the mercy of the God of Israel, who had not forgotten to be gracious.

Elisabeth's retirement from the busy affairs of life, in the seclusion of her country home, for the space of five months, was not only typical of the fact that she was to become the mother of one sanctified and set apart from the world, but it furnished favorable opportunity for meditation, and a preparation of mind and heart for the great honor, and the great responsibility as well, which were to crown her righteous old age.

With her faithful companion she saw that all the promises made to Israel touching the Messiah's forerunner were about to be fulfilled through her, and her expectation must have been painfully ardent. Only by constant communion with God, through his word and in prayer, could she sustain her precious burden.

Zacharias and Elisabeth were too well instructed in the Scriptures to have any sympathy with the unreasonable and fantastic expectations of the people in regard to a temporal reign of the Messiah; still they could not fail to look forward with much anxiety,

not to say curiosity, to the final results of these strange events. Their faith was strong, their hope ecstatic, and their love for Zion was their daily inspiration. It was a time for deep heart-searchings, heart-longings, and anxious prayer for wisdom to nourish the precious life so soon to be intrusted to them. It would be no ordinary task to surround their cherished boy with a constant atmosphere of knowledge and holiness, in keeping with his anticipated career.

The promise of a Messiah gave an especial charm and importance to honorable marriage and maternity among the Jews, and imparted to the work of training young children an especial dignity and sanctity; hence every Hebrew woman could appreciate the triumphant joy of Elisabeth's farewell words as she disappeared from the busy scenes of the temple-city: "Thus hath the Lord dealt with me in the days wherein he looked on me, to take away my reproach among men." Zacharias—that is, *The Lord remembers*—and Elisabeth—that is, *God's oath*—become now most significant names, in view of all that had happened and was yet promised to the highly favored ones who bore them.

Just here, also, we cannot fail to notice the marked similarity between the beginning and the end of the "old dispensation," or the "preparatory kingdom." The birth of John forcibly reminds us of the birth of Isaac. There is a most interesting accordance between

Zacharias and Abraham on the one hand and Elisabeth and Sarah on the other. They were old when the promised son was born to them; a son with whose advent were involved so many interests of vital import to Israel and to the world. In each case the remarkable birth, which is "an exaltation of nature above nature," is foretold to the father by a special angelic messenger. In each case those whom God so signally honored had passed through a very long course of training for the parentage of a man who was to occupy a most important place in the scheme of human enlightenment and redemption. Their spiritual graces had become beautifully matured; and, above all, their faith had, as the result of rugged discipline, become so vigorous that through it they received all requisite endowments for their necessary part in the fulfillment of God's gracious promises, a fact which was at once apparent in the admirable manner in which they heard and gratefully accepted the "glad tidings of great joy."

The hearts of Zacharias and Elisabeth throbbed in most befitting and deep sympathy with those of Abraham and Sarah as the grateful truth became familiar to their minds that the Jehovah who so graciously established his chosen people in the earth was now, as graciously, about to bring them to the highest fulfillment of their national hopes.

There is, also, a significance which cannot escape us in the fact that, whereas in the beginning of



the preparatory kingdom Sarah's faith was weaker than her husband's, at the close Elisabeth's faith was stronger even than that of an anointed priest of the temple; as if to proclaim to the world that the days of woman's servitude, as "the weaker vessel," are ended, and that in the new and perfect era she is to stand by the side of man as his equal, as necessary to his spiritual as well as his physical completeness, and as fellow-heir with him of the grace of life. 1 Pet. iii, 7.



## CHAPTER II.

## HEBRON AND THE HILL-COUNTRY OF JUDAH.

GREAT historical events stamp a dignity and importance on persons and places which they did not before possess. Particularly is this true of persons and places identified with scriptural history, in which the grand purposes of the Almighty are so clearly wrought out. In the study of such events and such places we come at the true philosophy of all history. Hence it is with keen interest, and thought most sacred, that we now turn toward the hill-country of Judah, and the particular city where the great forerunner first saw the light of day.

In the first and also the final distribution of the lands of Palestine, Judah, being one of the most important tribes, received not only a very large but a very valuable tract of country, with the Mediterranean for its western boundary, and Simeon on the south, to stand like an impregnable bulwark between its fair fields and the fierce tribes of the great "wilderness of wandering." On the east was the desert district called the "Wilderness of Judea," separated from Moab by the Dead Sea and the river Jordan, and on the north was the territory of Benjamin, beginning

with the neighborhood of Jerusalem and Mount Jearim, and the tribe of Dan, with a band of brave and well-trained soldiers, established on the commanding heights between Zorah and Eshtaol to defend the rich harvests of both Dan and Judah from the inroads of the Philistines. Josh. xv ; xix, 9 ; Judg. xiii, 25 ; xvi, 31 ; xviii, 12.

The whole of this territory was divided, for convenience of description, into three main regions. First, "the valley district," or the *Shephelah*: the broad belt lying between the high central region and the Mediterranean Sea. This was by far the most fertile portion of Judah. Here were the extensive grain-fields and olive-orchards and vineyards from which were gathered the enormous cargoes which Solomon sent to Tyre in payment for the material and skilled labor furnished by Hiram in the erection of the temple. 1 Kings v ; Acts xii, 20. Before the conquest this tract was held by the Philistines, and they were never completely dislodged by the men of Judah.

The number of cities in this district, exclusive of the villages connected with them as dependencies, was forty-two. The modern towns which occupy some of those ancient sites are remembered by the traveler as most remarkable for the beauty of their surroundings. The rich gardens with their profusion of pomegranates and other fruits, the enormous and luscious oranges which "gild the green foliage of

their famous groves," and the far-stretching fields of wheat, are as attractive to the cupidity of the Turkish tyrants of the land to-day as they were to the marauding Philistines in the times of Saul and David.

Second, the "hill-country of Judah," stretching north and south between Jerusalem and the borders of Simeon, and east and west between the wilderness slopes of the Dead Sea and the valley district. It is an elevated region, with its entire surface thrown into undulations by countless hills, and yet preserving a general level in both directions. Its towns and villages were numerous (Josh. xv, 48-60), generally perched on the tops of hills or on rocky slopes. It was almost an impregnable district, as the approaches to it were very difficult and easily defended.

The products of the soil were abundant. Rich valleys alternated with terraced hills. Corn, wine, oil, and fruits rewarded the husbandman's toil; while the shepherd found abundant pasturage for his flocks among the mountains on the east.

Judging from the ruins which now meet the eye of the traveler in every direction, this hill-country must have been thickly dotted with thriving towns and cities (Josh. xv, 48-60); while the groves of olive trees and the vineyards which still remain give a suggestion, at least, of the beauty and fertility of the land in the ancient days of its prosperity. There are no streams, except the torrents of the rainy season, but springs are now and then seen, and deep

wells are frequent. In the spring-time this whole region is covered with a rich carpet of wild-flowers of every variety and hue.

The third division is the wilderness or the sunken district immediately adjoining the Dead Sea. This desolate tract is about ten miles wide, from east to west, and from north to south extends the entire length of the sea. It is wild and barren, affording only here and there scant pasturage for sheep and goats, and has always been infested with fierce wild animals, while its caves and rocky fastnesses have afforded safe retreats for the worst of outlaws and robbers. 1 Sam. xvii, 34; Mark i, 13; 1 Sam. xxii, 1, 2.

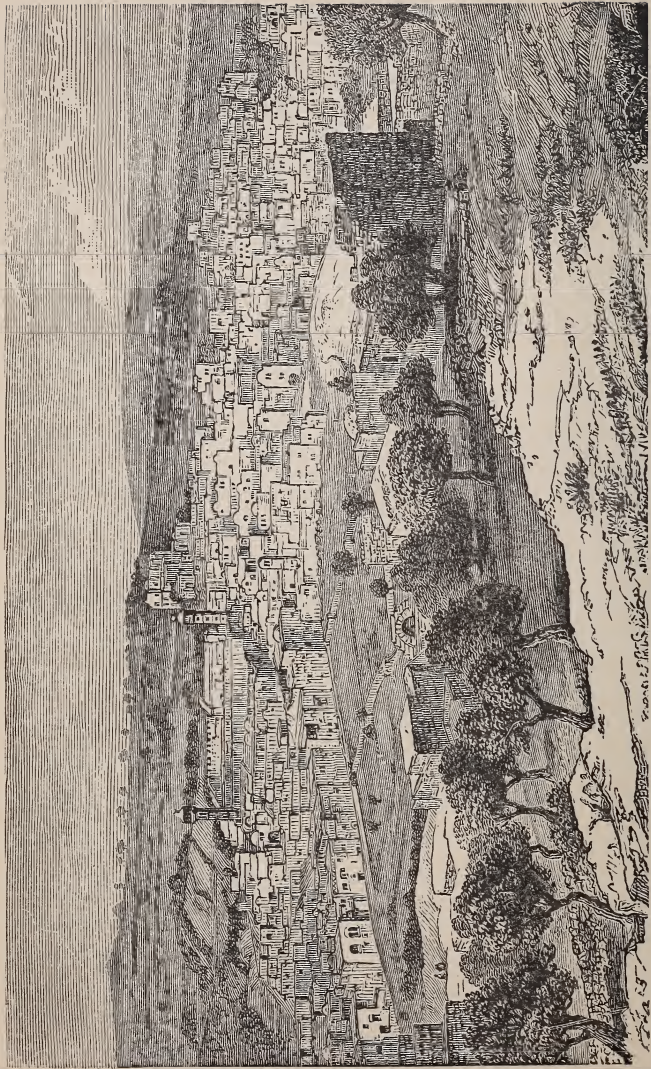
Each section of this region had its local name: as "the wilderness of Engedi" (1 Sam. xxiv, 1), the "wilderness of Judah" (Judg. i, 16), the "wilderness of Maon." 1 Sam. xxiii, 24.

In the frequent contests with wild beasts and robber hordes, which sallied forth from this region upon the flocks and other possessions of the tribe, the young warriors of Judah were trained and disciplined for the very important position they always occupied in the armies of Israel. Here David and his associates took their first lessons in successful warfare, and here, also, they found a safe refuge from the unrelenting tyranny of King Saul.

So far as we can learn, there were only six cities in all this wilderness, and these, like Engedi, were







Hebron.



perched on the cliffs overhanging the Dead Sea, or perhaps upon the higher slopes of the basin.

Nine cities of "the hill-country," or Judah proper, were allotted to the priests. Josh. xxi, 9-19. Of these Hebron seems to have been the principal one, and was probably the residence of Zacharias and Elizabeth, to which they retired immediately after the birth of John was so strangely announced.\*

Hebron is eighteen miles south of Jerusalem, near the southern extremity of that broad back of hills which marks the center of Judah, and stretches from this point northward until it is intersected by the plain of Esdraelon, beyond Shechem. According to Schubert it stands at the height of 2,664 Paris feet above the level of the sea. It is one of the oldest cities known to history, having been built "seven years before Zoan in Egypt" (Num. xiii, 22), and mentioned in the sacred record even before the famous city of Damascus. Compare Gen. xiii, 18; xv, 2. Its first name appears to have been Mamre, from the fact that it belonged to Abraham's Amoritic ally. Gen. xxiii, 19; xxxv, 27; xiv, 13, 24. Its second name was Kirjath-arba, that is, the city of

\* Some of the best scholars (notably Ewald, Reland, Van Oosterzee, and Lange) suppose that in the term "city of Judah," in Luke i, 39, Judah is but a softened name for Juttah, one of the priestly cities mentioned in Josh. xv, 55; xxi, 16, and which still exists under the modern name of *Yutta*. But in the absence of any real proof to justify this theory I prefer to adopt the more generally accepted opinion that Hebron was the birthplace of John the Baptist.

Arba, from Arba, chief of the Anakim, who dwelt in and about the city. Gen. xxiii, 2; Josh. xiv, 15; xxi, 11.

When Sarah died at Hebron, Abraham bought there the cave of Machpelah from Ephron the Hittite, for a family tomb. Gen. xxiii, 2-20. Here her body was laid, and finally Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were all entombed by her side. This was Abraham's favorite neighborhood, and from here the patriarchal family at last departed for Egypt by way of Beer-sheba. Gen. xxxvii, 14; xlvi, 1.

After the conquest of the country by the Israelites under Joshua, Hebron became one of the cities of refuge, and was one of the cities appointed for the residence of the priests and Levites. Josh. xx, 7; xxi, 11, 13. When David became king of Judah he made Hebron his royal residence for seven years and a half. Here most of his sons were born, and here, at last, the elders of the twelve tribes assembled to solemnly anoint him king over all Israel. 2 Sam. ii, 1-4, 11; 1 Kings ii, 11; 2 Sam. v, 1, 3. In Hebron Absalom first raised the standard of revolt against his father's government. 2 Sam. xv, 9, 10. Though desolate at the time of the captivity, on the return of the exiles they resettled Hebron and the surrounding villages and country. Neh. xi, 25.

Hebron is not named by the prophets, nor in the New Testament; but we learn from the Apocrypha, and from Josephus, that it came into the power of

the Edomites, who had taken possession of the south of Judah, and was recovered from them by Judas Maccabæus. During the great war Hebron was seized by the rebel Simon Giorides, but was recaptured and burned by Cerealis, an officer of Vespasian. Josephus describes the tombs of the patriarchs as existing in his day; and both Eusebius and Jerome, and all subsequent writers who mention Hebron down to the time of the crusades, speak of the place chiefly as containing these sepulchers. In the course of time, the remarkable structure inclosing the tombs of Abraham and the other patriarchs was called the "Castle of Abraham;" and by an easy transition this name came to be applied to the city itself, till in the time of the crusades the names of Hebron and Castle of Abraham were used interchangeably. Hence, as Abraham is also distinguished among the Moslems by the appellation of *el-Khalil*, "the friend" (of God), this latter epithet became, among them, the name of the city; and they now know Hebron only as el-Khalil. The Moslems relate that in a sore famine the Father of the Faithful dispatched his servants into Egypt to one of his own friends there, asking for corn. The Egyptian refused it, saying that if it were for Abraham and his family he would send it instantly, but as he knew that what he sent would be given away to all the poor of the land, in Abraham's usual manner, he would not consent to send him any to be thus wasted. The servants, ashamed to be seen

coming back with empty bags, filled them with fine sand, which they brought home, telling the result of their journey to Abraham alone. As he lay on his couch, revolving in his brain the means of preserving his family and retainers from impending starvation, Sarah went to one of the bags, which had been deposited in the tent, and, opening it, took out meal and baked bread. Abraham, smelling the burning bread, demanded where she had obtained the meal, and she replied, "It is what came but just now from your friend in Egypt." "Say, rather," exclaimed the grateful patriarch, "that it came from my friend God Almighty."

Soon after the crusaders had taken Jerusalem, Hebron also appears to have passed into their hands, and in 1100 was bestowed as a fief upon Gerhard of Avennes; but two years after it is described as being in ruins. In 1167 Hebron was raised to the rank of a bishopric, and the title of Bishop of Hebron long remained in the Romish Church, for it occurs so late as A.D. 1365. But it was merely nominal; for after the capture of Jerusalem by Saladin in 1187, Hebron also reverted to the Moslems, and has ever since remained in their possession. In the fourteenth century pilgrims passed from Sinai to Jerusalem direct through the desert by Beersheba and Hebron. In the following century this route seems to have been abandoned for that by Gaza; yet the pilgrims sometimes took Hebron in their way, or visited it from Gaza. The

travelers of that period describe as existing here an immense charitable establishment, or hospital, where twelve hundred loaves of bread, besides oil and other condiments, were daily distributed to all comers, without distinction of age or religion, at the annual expense of twenty thousand ducats.\*

The modern town of Hebron is situated in a valley which has its head at a point about four miles north of the place, and runs S.-S.-E. This is supposed to be the "valley of Eshcol" where the Jewish spies gathered the huge cluster of grapes with which they astonished their friends on their return to camp. Num. xiii, 23. The valley is at first broad, and beautiful with its many vineyards, but narrows as it approaches the town, and at last is shut in by high hills on either side. Hebron is really a cluster of three small towns. The main town, where are the great mosque, and the bazars, and all the principal business places, lies upon the slope of the eastern hill and extends well down into the valley. North of this, and beyond quite a stretch of unoccupied plain, is a sort of suburban village principally given up to dwellings, such as they are.

The slope of the western hill is also well covered by a cluster of houses; and although, like all eastern towns, Hebron is not particularly delightful in itself,

\* In the foregoing historical sketch of Hebron, I have drawn largely from the article on that city in McClintock and Strong's Cyclopaedia, where copious references to original authorities will be found.



still, in the beauty of its situation, and the general attractiveness of its surroundings, it has few, if any, equals in all Palestine.

The town has no wall; the streets are unusually narrow, with a pretense of pavement which only makes the path more perilous; the houses are usually well built of stone, each flat roof adorned with two or three queer little cupolas; the shops are often well furnished with commodities prettily arranged, and altogether there is quite an appearance of thrift as compared with the average dirty and sleepy Egyptian or Syrian town.

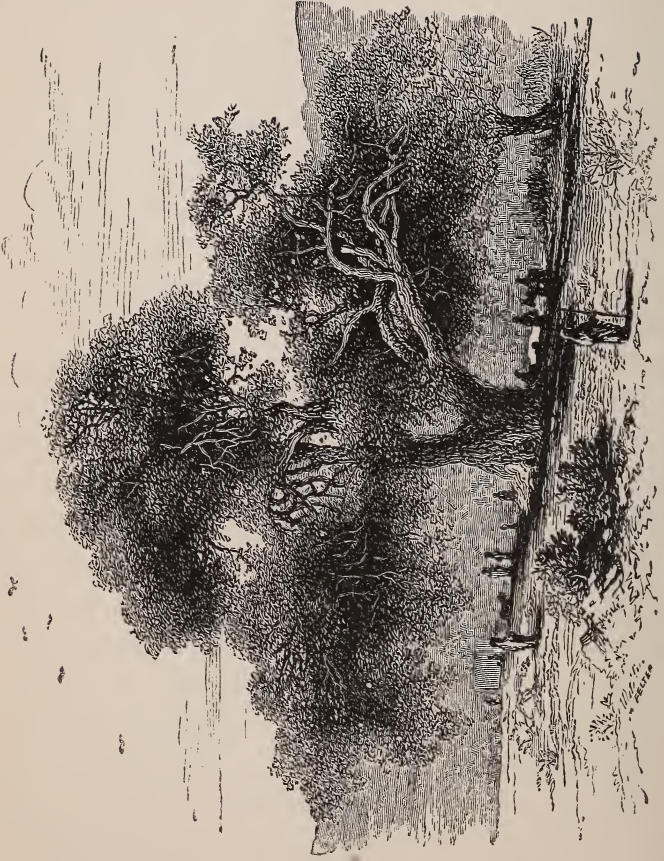
One of the favorite camping-grounds of travelers is at a point above and over against the main town, where the retreating top of the western hill leaves a gently sloping strip of ground. Just north of this, in the midst of the orchards of very old olive trees, is a cool and abundant fountain gushing from underneath an arch.

In the bottom of the deep valley, south of the main town, are the ancient pools or reservoirs built of hewn stone and filled with water from the rains. Men, women, children, donkeys, and dogs are constantly seeking these pools, as the most convenient if not the principal source of water supply for the town.

The valley and sloping hill-sides above and below Hebron are very fertile. Vineyards, extensive plantations of thrifty olive trees, and groups of almond trees are seen in every direction; the grain fields give promise of abundant harvests, while great numbers







Abraham's Oak.

of cattle, sheep, goats, and donkeys evidently find rich pasturage upon the more rugged hill-tops.

Another attractive resting-place for travelers is about a mile north of the town, in the midst of the vineyards, where stands "Abraham's oak," said to be the very tree under which the patriarch pitched his tent when he dwelt in the plain, or oak grove, of Mamre.\* Gen. xviii. Although this oak, extremely ancient as it evidently is, cannot possibly date back to Abraham, still it is by far the finest tree in Palestine, and hence an object of deep interest to all who visit the region. Its trunk is, by actual measurement, twenty-three feet in circumference, and its branches cover a space nearly one hundred feet in diameter.

As the place where the future glory of God's chosen nation was first revealed to its great founder (Gen. xvii) this lovely valley, viewed from beneath the magnificent oak, has a peculiar charm to the Christian visitor. Memory and imagination at once become reverently active, and, whether it be in the stillness of the noon-tide hour or when the sunset glory is upon the landscape, the whole region is alive with the scenes and personages of history. The spell of the past is upon us, and we seem for the moment to walk and talk with God's heroes as, one after the other, from Abraham to John the Baptist, they halt at our tent and accept our humble hospitality.

About five thousand fierce and intolerant Moslems

\* Lange on Gen. xiv, 13, and Gen. xviii, 1.

make up the population of modern Hebron. No Christians are allowed to dwell so near the sacred remains of the patriarchs. A few Jews are tolerated in a quarter of the town set apart for their exclusive use, and which is as mean and filthy as such localities usually are. There are two or three rude glass-blowing establishments in Hebron, where glass bracelets and anklets are made for the women and children of the country in great quantities.

The principal place of interest inside the town is, of course, the great mosque built over the cave of Machpelah and the tombs of the patriarchs; a place the authenticity of which is not questioned by Dr. Robinson or any of the most critical explorers of Palestine, and which answers to every descriptive point in the scriptural narrative.\* Gen. xxiii. The mosque stands upon the slope of the eastern hill, and its exterior shows an enormous stone building in the form of a parallelogram. The walls are built of very large stones with beveled edges, similar to those in the foundation walls of the temple area at Jerusalem. There are no windows in any part of these outer walls, and they are raised so very high that no profane eyes from without can possibly overlook them. The interior is regarded by the Moslems as holy ground. Jews are only allowed to look within at certain set times, while Christians can never enter except by stratagem or by royal permit. Denied,

\* Robinson's *Researches in Palestine*, vol. ii, 77-79.

therefore, the privilege of personal study and description of this vast shrine, I must content myself with offering to my readers Dean Stanley's graphic account of his visit to it, in the spring of 1862, in company with the Prince of Wales and his suite :

“At length we reached the south-eastern corner of the massive wall of inclosure, the point at which inquiring travelers from generation to generation have been checked in their approach to this, the most ancient and the most authentic of all the holy places of the Holy Land. Up the steep flight of the exterior staircase—gazing close at hand on the polished surface of the wall, amply justifying Josephus's account of the marble-like appearance of the huge stones which compose it—we rapidly mounted. At the head of the staircase, which by its long ascent showed that the platform of the mosque was on the uppermost slope of the hill, and therefore above the level where, if anywhere, the sacred cave would be found, a sharp turn at once brought us within the precincts, and revealed to us for the first time the wall from the inside. A later wall, of Mussulman times, has been built on the top of the Jewish inclosure. The inclosure itself, as seen from the inside, rises but a few feet above the platform. Here we were received with much ceremony by five or six persons corresponding to the dean and canons of a Christian cathedral. They were the representatives of the forty hereditary guardians of the mosque.



“We passed at once through an open court into the mosque. With regard to the building itself, two points at once became apparent: First, it was clear that it had been originally a Byzantine church. To any one acquainted with the cathedral of St. Sophia at Constantinople, and with the Monastic churches of Mount Athos, this is evident from the double narthex or portico, and from the four pillars of the nave. Secondly, it was clear that it had been converted at a much later period into a mosque. This is indicated by the painted arches and by the truncation of the apsis. The transformation was said by the guardians of the mosque to have been made by Sultan Kelaoun. The whole building occupies (to speak roughly) one third of the platform. The windows are sufficiently high to be visible from without, above the top of the inclosing wall.

“I now proceed to describe the tombs of the patriarchs, premising always that these tombs, like all those in Mussulman mosques, and indeed like most tombs in Christian churches, do not profess to be the actual places of sepulture, but are merely monuments or cenotaphs in honor of the dead who lie beneath. Each is inclosed within a separate chapel or shrine, closed with gates or railings similar to those which surround or inclose the special chapels or royal tombs in Westminster Abbey. The two first of these shrines or chapels are contained in the inner portico or narthex, before the entrance into the actual building or mosque.



In the recess on the right is the shrine of Abraham, in the recess on the left that of Sarah, each guarded by silver gates. The shrine of Sarah we were requested not to enter, as being that of a woman. A pall lay over it. The shrine of Abraham, after a momentary hesitation, was thrown open. The guardians groaned aloud. But their chief turned to me with the remark, 'The princes of any other nation should have passed over my dead body sooner than enter. But to the eldest son of the queen of England we are willing to accord even this privilege.' He stepped in before us and offered an ejaculatory prayer to the dead patriarch: 'O friend of God, forgive this intrusion.' We then entered. The chamber is cased in marble. The so-called tomb consists of a coffin-like structure, about six feet high, built up of plastered stone or marble, and hung with three carpets, green embroidered with gold. Fictitious as the actual structure was, it was impossible not to feel a thrill of unusual emotion at standing on such a spot. Within the area of the mosque were shown the tombs of Isaac and Rebekah. They are placed under separate chapels, in the walls of which are windows, and of which the gates are grated not with silver but iron bars. Their situation, planted as they are in the body of the mosque, may indicate their Christian origin. In almost all Mussulman sanctuaries the tombs of distinguished persons are placed, not in the center of the building, but in the corners. To Rebekah's tomb the

same decorous rule of the exclusion of male visitors naturally applied as in the case of Sarah's. But on requesting to see the tomb of Isaac we were entreated not to enter; and on asking, with some surprise, why an objection which had been conceded for Abraham should be raised in the case of his far less eminent son, were answered that the difference lay in the characters of the two patriarchs—'Abraham was full of loving-kindness; he had withstood even the resolution of God against Sodom and Gomorrah; he was goodness itself, and would overlook any affront. But Isaac was proverbially jealous, and it was exceedingly dangerous to exasperate him. When Ibrahim Pasha (as conqueror of Palestine) had endeavored to enter, he had been driven out by Isaac, and fell back as if thunderstruck.' The chapel, in fact, contains nothing of interest; but I mention this story both for the sake of the singular sentiment which it expresses, and also because it well illustrates the peculiar feeling which has tended to preserve the sanctity of the place—an awe, amounting to terror, of the great personages who lay beneath, and who would, it was supposed, be sensitive to any disrespect shown to their graves, and revenge it accordingly. The shrines of Jacob and Leah were shown in recesses corresponding to those of Abraham and Sarah. The gates of Jacob's tomb were opened without difficulty, though with a deep groan from the bystanders. There was some good painted glass in one of the windows. The structure

was of the same kind as that in the shrine of Abraham, but with carpets of a coarser texture. Else it calls for no special remark."

After mentioning the tomb of Joseph (to which, the Mussulmans say, the body of Joseph was removed from Shechem), in a domed chamber attached to the inclosure from the outside, and the more modern structure over the tomb of Judah, which constitute the only variations from the catalogue of tombs in the book of Genesis, Dean Stanley continues :

"We have now gone through all the shrines, whether of real or fictitious importance, which the sanctuary includes. It will be seen that up to this point no mention has been made of the subject of greatest interest, namely, the sacred cave itself, in which one at least of the patriarchal family may possibly still repose intact—the embalmed body of Jacob. It may be well supposed that to this object our inquiries were throughout directed. One indication alone of the cavern beneath was visible. In the interior of the mosque, at the corner of the shrine of Abraham, was a small circular hole, about eight inches across, of which one foot above the pavement was built of strong masonry, but of which the lower part, as far as we could see and feel, was of the living rock. This cavity appeared to open into a dark space beneath, and that space (which the guardians of the mosque believe to extend under the whole platform) can hardly be any thing else than the ancient cavern

of Machpelah. This was the only aperture which the guardians recognized. Once, they said, two thousand five hundred years ago, a servant of a great king had penetrated through some other entrance. He descended in full possession of his faculties, and of remarkable corpulence; he returned blind, deaf, withered, and crippled. Since then the entrance was closed, and this aperture alone was left, partly for the sake of suffering the holy air of the cave to escape into the mosque and be scented by the faithful; partly for the sake of allowing a lamp to be let down by a chain which we saw suspended at the mouth, to burn upon the sacred grave. We asked whether it could not be lighted now. 'No,' they said; 'the saints like to have a lamp at night, but not in the full daylight.'

"With that glimpse into the dark void we and the world without must for the present be satisfied. Whether any other entrance is known to the Mussulmans themselves must be a matter of doubt. The original entrance to the cave, if it is now to be found at all, must probably be on the southern face of the hill, between the mosque and the gallery containing the shrine of Joseph, and entirely obstructed by the very ancient Jewish wall, probably built across it for this very purpose. It seems to our notions almost incredible that Christians and Mussulmans, each for a period of six hundred years, should have held possession of the sanctuary, and not had the curiosity to

explore what to us is the one object of interest—the cave. But the fact is undoubted that no account exists of any such attempt. Such a silence can only be explained (but it is probably a sufficient explanation) by the indifference which prevailed, throughout the Middle Ages, to any historical spots, however interesting, unless they were actually consecrated as places of pilgrimage. And to this must be added, in the case of Mussulmans generally, the terror which they entertain of the effect of the wrath of the patriarchs on any one who should intrude into the place where they are supposed still to be in a kind of suspended animation. As far back as the seventeenth century it was firmly believed that if any Mussulman entered the cavern immediate death would be the consequence.”\* No obstacle to knowledge is so effectual as superstition.

There are two or three accounts by travelers who gained even a nearer view than did Dean Stanley, and by one or two who enjoyed unusual opportunities for securing information from the guardians of the mosque. All of these accounts substantially agree that under the elevated platform of the mosque there are two large natural grottoes, one beyond or above the other; that the patriarchs and their wives are said to be buried in the lower or farther one; and that even the highest officials of the mosque only enter the first grotto, while the actual sepulcher remains, cent-

\* Appendix II to *Lectures on the Jewish Church*, Part I.



ury after century, undisturbed.\* This is all that can be learned, with any degree of definiteness, of a place full of sacred interest alike to Jewish and Christian scholars, but which is effectually closed to their critical investigations by the fierce and superstitious representatives of the worst religion and the worst government under the sun.

\* *Buried Cities Recovered*, by Dr. F. S. De Hass, p. 216. M. Ermete Pierotti in *London Times* of April 30, 1862.



## CHAPTER III.

## MARY'S VISIT TO ELISABETH.

SIX months after Gabriel's announcement to Zacharias in the temple he was sent with a still more important message to the Virgin Mary at Nazareth—even the full annunciation of the coming Messiah himself. Mary accepted the honor about to be bestowed upon her, notwithstanding the severe trial of her faith which it involved, with the patience and thankfulness of long expectation. Her gentle soul was attuned to perfect harmony with the calm and unostentatious spirit which marked the entrance of the Divine into the world of man. For a time at least she was shut off, by the very nature and manner of the revelation, from communion with those around her; and, although lifted into a state of ecstatic hope and joy, her solitude became unbearable. She longed for some one in whom she could safely confide; with whom she could converse while she waited, in trembling expectation, the fulfillment of the divine promise. At this moment she remembered that Gabriel had assured her, as a token of God's power and faithfulness to bring to pass all that he had promised, that her kinswoman Elisabeth,

although well advanced in a childless old age, should soon, through divine interposition, be blessed with a son. To Elisabeth, then, she could safely intrust her secret. So, eager for sympathy and companionship in her marvelous experience, she made ready in great haste, and, taking advantage of the freedom accorded to Hebrew women even in those early times, she set out for Hebron, the distant residence of her cousin.

It was at least a hundred miles from Nazareth to Hebron, a long journey for a maiden so young and perhaps unprotected. But distance and danger counted as nothing with one who was sustained by the exalted hope of fulfilling the expectation of Israel; an honor for which every Hebrew mother had prayed from the days of Moses until now.

With that part of her route which lay between Nazareth and Jerusalem she was very familiar, as she had trodden it often before in the visits which she and her kinsfolk annually paid to the temple. It was a beautiful country through which she passed, and each succeeding locality reminded her more forcibly than its predecessors of the ancient glory of her people.

To the left of her well-trodden path was Mount Tabor, like a faithful sentinel mounting guard over the broad and fertile plain of Esdraelon, and telling to each generation the romantic story of Barak and Sisera. Judg. iv. The waters of Kishon laved her weary feet for a moment, while they sang in her

willing ear the song of Deborah. Judg. v. A little to the east Mount Gilboa rose upon her view, with the story of Saul's last battle and tragic death. 1 Chron. x. At Samaria, or *Sebaste*, as Herod's new and splendid city was called, she probably tarried for a night to rest and recall its two centuries of history as the famous capital of the northern kingdom, and the scene of so many acts of the prophets Elijah and Elisha as they denounced its idolatry and sought to destroy its heathen temples. Then came Ebal and Gerizim, around whose tops the blessings and the cursings of Jehovah's law still seemed to linger (Deut. xi, 29; Josh. viii, 30-35), and Shechem, "the paradise of Palestine," and Jacob's well, and Joseph's tomb; and perhaps a night at Bethel, with its memory of the patriarch's vision (Gen. xxviii, 10-22), so full of comfort and hope, and so closely allied to her own joyful experience and expectation. Mary's song plainly shows that when passing the ancient sanctuary at Shiloh her mind dwelt lovingly upon Hannah's hymn of thanksgiving before the Lord, and Samuel's call, in the solemn watches of the night, to the office of prophet and judge over a misruled people. 1 Sam. i-iii.

At last she reached Jerusalem, and looked once more upon the magnificent temple, the splendor of which was so soon to fade away before the rising glory of her divine Son and Lord.

One day more sufficed for the journey from

Jerusalem to Hebron; a day full of great thoughts to a Hebrew woman so peculiarly sensitive to patriotic influences, and with heart so well attuned to the patriotic strains of her royal ancestor. Rachel's tomb claimed an hour's devotion and meditation from the gentle wayfarer. Soon her sandals pressed the tender herbage of the shepherds' plain, she little dreaming that the soft air above her was ere long to resound with the mighty melody of heaven's own music, bursting forth in a glad song the echoes of which should linger in every land and every age.

Next came Bethlehem, the scene of her future agony and triumph, and at last the grateful shade of Mamre's magnificent oak welcomed her weary footsteps. One brief effort more, and she reached the quiet home of Elisabeth, where, according to Oriental custom, she reverently saluted the venerable wife of the honored priest. Mary's heart thrilled with joy when, instead of using the commonplace form of greeting, Elisabeth broke forth in the very words which the angel had so recently spoken in her astonished ear: "Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? . . . And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord." Luke i, 42, 43, 45.

It has been well said that this is "the first beatitude of the New Testament, and, in a certain sense, the





Bethlehem.





root of all the rest. Elisabeth, while extolling the blessedness of Mary on account of her faith and obedience, was undoubtedly reflecting with compassion on the condition of Zacharias, whose unbelief had been reproved with loss of speech, while the believing Mary was entering her house with joyful salutations." \*

Mary had no need to tell her precious secret. It was already known to Elisabeth, and that divinely communicated knowledge became a fresh token of God's favor and a fresh stimulus to the faith of these two friends, drawn together by a common sympathy and a common hope.

Elisabeth's humility and strength of character become most marked as she rises above all distinctions of station and age and rank, and not only greets with true hospitality her humbler relative, but ungrudgingly, and in the fervent utterance of love, acknowledges the higher distinction conferred upon her, and marvels that such an honor should come, even to Zacharias's priestly home, as the permission to welcome and shelter the mother of Israel's Messiah.

But now the spirit of praise and song came in a still greater measure upon Mary herself. The daughter of David's royal line, like all the more intelligent and devout of her race, was familiar with the lyrics of the Old Testament. Many times had her soul been thrilled as she read the sublime utterances of

\* Lange on Luke i, 42.

Isaiah and his prophetic brethren ; so it is not strange that, favored and inspired of the Holy Spirit, she gave to Elisabeth's wonderful salutation a still more wonderful response, in the "Magnificat," which, though evidently no carefully composed ode, but simply an unpremeditated outburst of sacred emotion and inspiring faith, is still worthy a descendant of Israel's poet-king, and worthy, as well, to be forever cherished by the Church of God as the first and fullest of our Christian hymns. Mary said :

"My soul doth magnify the Lord,  
 And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.  
 For he hath looked upon the low estate of his handmaiden :  
 For behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.  
 For he that is mighty hath done to me great things ;  
 And holy is his name.  
 And his mercy is unto generations and generations  
 On them that fear him.  
 He hath showed strength with his arm ;  
 He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their heart.  
 He hath put down princes from their thrones,  
 And hath exalted them of low degree.  
 The hungry he hath filled with good things ;  
 And the rich he hath sent empty away.  
 He hath holpen Israel his servant,  
 That he might remember mercy  
 (As he spake unto our fathers)  
 Toward Abraham and his seed forever."

In words as clear and impressive as though Jehovah himself should speak to men, this hymn of the Virgin proclaims that the prophecy which for ages has sus-

tained the hope of Israel is about to be fulfilled, and the race has "reached the point of contact between God and man."

As "the poetess and prophetess of the infant Church," Mary sings not only of God's goodness to herself, but, in strains worthy to mingle with those of Hannah and David and Isaiah, she foretells the power and glory of the coming gospel kingdom. The spirit and genius of the Baptist and the Christ blend in the inspired song, as the two mothers stand side by side upon the threshold of the new dispensation. We almost hear the voice of one who cried in the wilderness: "Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it." As we listen, a clearer, sweeter tone strikes upon our ears, and the voice of our divine Lord speaks to our hearts in the words of authority and love; words that shall forever be the inspiration of the new gospel, and the new Church: "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled."

For three months these noble and devout women

dwelt together in Hebron, holding sweet converse as they doubtless united in the simple labors of the Oriental household, giving much time to the study of the Scriptures, as well as high and holy thoughts upon the past promise and future purpose of God touching the Messiah and his forerunner. They, without doubt, in common with the entire nation, were looking for certain civil and political advantages through the advent of the Messiah; but their minds were too clear, and they were too manifestly taught of God, not to regard the expected temporal emancipation as, after all, but the symbol of that higher salvation which was to be the crown and glory of Israel and the redemption of the whole earth.

At the end of the three months Mary retraced her steps to her home in Nazareth, there to await with calmness and patience the revelations of Providence and her own complete vindication.

## CHAPTER IV.

## JOHN'S BIRTH.

A. U. C. 748 or 749.

SHORTLY after Mary's return to Nazareth Elisabeth's expected son was born. It was a time for men and angels to rejoice, as Zacharias and Elisabeth first gazed upon the face of the child who was not only the fulfillment of God's promise to his aged servants, but whose first plaintive cry heralded the event for which the world so long had waited: the advent of the world's Redeemer.

The devout father received the babe in a silence which, although enforced, must have been not altogether unwelcome; for it was one of those moments when words, as the exponents of the most sacred thoughts and the tenderest emotions, seem so poor and mean that they are better left unsaid.

As soon as the relatives and neighbors of the priestly family heard of the birth they thronged the house, according to time-honored Oriental custom, to rejoice with the parents; for although they were ignorant of the real significance of the event, they still counted it an amazing token of God's mercy to a noble and honored household.



The exact date of John's birth cannot be given.\* The chronology of his life and ministry is beset with many difficulties, and yet it is so blended with that of our Lord that all the purposes, of these pages, at least, will be met at this point by the general statement that John was born about six months before the birth of Jesus.†

On the eighth day there was a large assemblage of relatives and friends at the house of Zacharias; for the circumstances attending the birth of the child, and particularly the condition of the father, had been spread abroad throughout the city, and very naturally attracted special attention to the circumcision and naming, which, in accordance with He-

\* Those who are interested in the various opinions on this point are referred to an elaborate discussion of the subject in Appendix A of Dr. Henry Robert Reynolds's *John the Baptist; a Contribution to Christian Evidences*.

† The day of John's birth—Midsummer day—has always been kept as a great festival in the Christian Church, especially at Florence. Mrs. Jameson says: "There is a legend that the Virgin Mary prolonged her visit to her cousin Elisabeth till after the birth of St. John, received the child in her arms, and presented him to his father. In the Florence Gallery is a curious and interesting example of the manner in which the Florentines mixed up their great protecting saint with their domestic life. It is a large, round, deep wooden dish, such as was used to present sweetmeats or presents to a lady in her confinement. In the center Pontorno has painted very beautifully the birth of St. John the Baptist, with all the usual accompaniments—Elisabeth reclining on her couch, attendants washing the new-born child, etc."—*History of Our Lord in Art*.

brew custom, were simultaneously to take place at that time.\* Gen. xxi, 3, 4.

It has been remarked by students of Oriental customs that the practice of naming the child, with appropriate ceremonies, on the seventh or eighth day after birth, prevails in almost every part of the East, even where the rite of circumcision has been unknown. According to Ewald this custom exists among the Khandi in India, as well as among many tribes of negroes. The same writer also gives good reasons for connecting this practice with the ancient sacred division of time into weeks.† Among the

\* Dr. D. D. Whedon in his comment on Luke i, 59, says: "Circumcision was given by God to Abraham as a sign of the covenant between God and the circumcised. Perhaps it was, as in the case of sacrifices, merely the renewal of an ancient rite, for we find that not only the Jews and other Abrahamic tribes practiced the rite, but the Ethiopians, Abyssinians, Egyptians, and others. Under the Mosaic law infant circumcision was the rite of induction into the kingdom of God. It was the condition to be performed before the adult person could partake of the paschal host. This was enjoined with great solemnity. So, under the Christian dispensation, except a man be externally born of water he cannot see the external kingdom of God. That is, as circumcision once so baptism now is the admission rite of the Church of God. From this it would follow that no one who is not qualified—if an adult, by justifying faith; if an infant, by the unconditional power of the atonement—to enter the kingdom of God is qualified for baptism. And as circumcision was required previous to the paschal feast, so baptism should be performed previous to the partaking of the communion."

† *Israel. Alterthümer*, p. 110.

Greeks and Romans, also, it was customary to name the child on the day of purification.

On this occasion the friends, in harmony with the custom of their people, were about to bestow upon the child the honored name of his father; but Elisabeth, who had doubtless learned from Zacharias what his name was commanded to be, interfered, and said, "Not so; but he shall be called John." Then, in true Eastern style, there arose a noisy dispute. The relatives insisted that none of the child's kindred had been called by that name, and that it would, therefore, be an innovation which ought not to be thought of. But Elisabeth was firm; so at last the matter was referred, by signs, to the deaf and dumb Zacharias, who was naturally the final authority in the case. Zacharias called for a writing table,\* and to the utter astonishment of the company he quickly wrote, "His name is John." Not, "His name *shall be called* John," as though the father's judgment and authority were alone concerned in the matter, but "His name *is* John," for Gabriel, as Jehovah's representative, had already named him in token of the special dispensation of divine mercy and love which his birth was to inaugurate. Bishop Penick says:

"John came to usher in the King of grace, the

\* The writing tablet was a smooth, flat piece of wood, overspread with a surface of wax. The writing was done with an iron stylus, one end of which was sharp-pointed, for scratching upon the wax, and the other end broad and smooth, for erasing the letters.

reign of God's love ; and it was meet and fit that with his very name he should cut asunder those associations that bound him to the old order of things, for he came to proclaim the kingdom of heaven at hand ; the shadows past and the substance present. He came to honor God's grace, not to prolong Zacharias's name, family line, or priesthood. The preacher John takes the place of the priest Zacharias, and the wilderness and the conquest of the world are substituted for Jerusalem and the temple. No wonder that all present marveled at those words written by Zacharias. No wonder they laid up those words in their hearts, saying, 'What manner of child shall this be?' For in that name and its surroundings they felt a trembling like that of an earthquake strike through all the structures of the Levitical dispensation."

No sooner had Zacharias performed this act of faith in acknowledgment of Jehovah's authority and fulfillment of his promise than his lips were unsealed, and he broke forth into thanksgiving and praise. The sign was of no further use, for the reality had come.

No wonder the assembled friends were filled with an amazement which was soon intensified into fear. Neither is it strange that soon afterward the story of all these unusual occurrences and startling sayings should be "noised abroad throughout all the hill-country of Judea." The thought that the angel of God had, after so great a lapse of time, again visited Israel,

and that the days of prophecy and miracles had not yet passed, compelled the attention and quickened the faith of the best and most intelligent among the people, so that with brightening hope they watched the development of the lad to see what manner of child he would turn out to be.

The gratitude and exultant joy which filled the heart of Zacharias did not find its most appropriate utterance on the day of circumcision, but not long after the power of the Holy Spirit rested upon him at what may be called the culminating moment of his life, when the loftiest expressions of praise and prophecy sprang to his lips, and broke forth in the grand "Benedictus," which will forever link his name with the most gifted of Israel's prophets and singers. In language of poetic beauty as well as spiritual triumph he exclaimed (Luke i, 63-79, Rev. Ver.):

"Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel;  
 For he hath visited and wrought redemption for his people;  
 And hath raised up a horn of salvation for us  
 In the house of his servant David  
 (As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets which have been  
 since the world began),  
 Salvation from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us;  
 To show mercy towards our fathers,  
 And to remember his holy covenant;  
 The oath which he sware unto Abraham our father,  
 To grant unto us that we being delivered out of the hand of our ene-  
 mies  
 Should serve him without fear,  
 In holiness and righteousness before him all our days.



Yea, and thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Most High:  
For thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to make ready his  
ways;

To give knowledge of salvation unto his people  
In the remission of their sins,  
Because of the tender mercies of our God,  
Whereby the dayspring from on high shall visit us,  
To shine upon them that sit in darkness and the shadow of death;  
To guide our feet into the way of peace."

Dr. Philip Schaff says: "The 'Magnificat' of the Virgin Mary and the 'Benedictus' of Zacharias are the Psalms of the New Testament, and worthily introduce the history of Christian hymnology. They prove the harmony of poetry and religion. They are the noblest flowers of Hebrew lyric poetry, sending their fragrance to the approaching Messiah. They are full of reminiscences of the Old Testament, entirely Hebrew in tone and language, and can be rendered almost word for word. These hymns form a part of the regular morning service in the Anglican liturgy, and resound from Sabbath to Sabbath in Christian lands." The 'Benedictus' itself can scarcely be better described than in the words of Dr. J. P. Lange: "The song of praise now uttered by Zacharias had so gradually and completely ripened in his soul that he could never forget it in the future. This song depicts the form and stature of his faith; it is the expression of the Gospel, as his heart had received it. It is with a truly priestly intuition that Zacharias sees the reconciliation and transformation of the world in

the advent of the Messiah. The coming Christ appears to him the true altar of salvation for his people, who henceforth, delivered from their enemies, shall perform truly real worship, celebrating the service of God in perpetual freedom. It is this that is his heart's delight—as a priest. His heart's delight as a father is that his son John shall be the herald of the Lord, to give the knowledge of his salvation even to them who sit in darkness and the shadow of death.”\*

The closing passage of this prophetic psalm, in which the coming salvation is represented as “the dayspring from on high,” is scarcely equaled in all the range of Hebrew poetry as the beautiful expression of a lofty thought. It places before us, in its full glory and blessedness, the celestial morning whose rising beams shall forever dispel the darkness of earth. Far deeper and stronger than his paternal gratitude and delight was the joy with which Zacharias hailed the world's Redeemer. This last prophetic utterance concerning Christ before his birth is the grandest and most inspiring of all. God's chastening had accomplished a thorough work in the devout soul of the aged priest. As Moses smote the rock in the wilderness and there gushed forth streams of pure, living water to slake the thirst of the multitude, so from the smitten heart of Zacharias there leaped forth a song of faith and joy and triumph which shall slake the soul-thirst of God's saints to the end of time. He was

\* *Leben Jesu*, ii, p. 90.

now in full accord with God's purposes, and the heavenly kingdom was nearer and dearer to him than even this son of his old age. In the supreme moment, when he first felt the thrill of paternal life, he did not say, "*my* child," but gladly acknowledged God's claim upon the future prophet. This influential and learned priest, in a position to start his only son upon a career of high worldly success, freely devoted him, from his very birth, to a self-denying, toilsome, and even dangerous commission.

In all this Zacharias gives to Christian parents a notable example of heroic consecration; a consecration which holds the most precious child not only as a gift from God, but as forever subject to God's command, and bound to God's service; a consecration which recognizes the true relation between the creature and the Creator, and enables the parent to see that the humblest service for God and the truth brings with it the highest distinction and deepest satisfaction that this mortal life can yield.

The reader will undoubtedly appreciate Dr. D. D. Whedon's closing remarks upon the birth of John and the song of Zacharias: "On the very eve of the Messiah's appearing the speakers are still in the dimness of the Jewish dispensation as to the exact character of the Messiah and his reign. Had these prophetic passages been, as skeptics represent, composed after the crucifixion, or even after the destruction of Jerusalem, the writer would have suited the details to

the then existing facts. All these elements which are here ascribed to the Messiah's kingdom are really in its very nature and substance, and are to be developed in its history from the beginning and in future ages. Mercy, holiness, truth, light, and peace are its inmost principles; and to those are given, in the present and future, power to triumph in the world. The Messiah now truly lives and reigns in this kingdom. He lives and reigns *personally* and *in the body*. He *lives* and *reigns* as *personally* and *corporeally* as if he reigned visibly, and as if he now sat upon a golden throne in the city of Jerusalem. He sways the scepter of the world though the world be in rebellion. Without visible manifestation or show of physical or mechanical power, and allowing the principles of probation and free agency to work out their problem, he is ever ruling and overruling the affairs of men in order to the development and ultimate prevalence of the reign of truth and righteousness in the earth, in order that millions on millions may be redeemed; to the end that he shall finally 'see the travail of his soul and be satisfied.'

"Christian scholars have always been aware that in the narrative of the births both of John and of Jesus there is abundance both of events and phrases that are framed after the model of Old Testament examples. Zacharias is visited in the same manner by an angel, and with the same message, as was Abraham. Mary's hymn is paralleled by Hannah's upon a similar

occasion. John is, like Samson, heralded by an angel before his birth, and is bound to be a Nazarite. The mythical scheme of the skeptical Strauss uses these well-known facts to show that the whole story is a fabrication manufactured by the imagination of the early Christians out of these Old Testament histories blended mythically together. His system represents the main share of Gospel history to be thus constructed out of Old Testament materials. Every New Testament fact that has any thing like it in the Old Testament is a plagiary and an imitation, and every event fulfilling an Old Testament prophecy is held to be invented to fit the prophecy, or to be made out of the prophecy itself. The real truth is that the Old Testament does contain the kernel and shadows of the New. The Jewish people were a living type of a better dispensation. The prediction is verified in the fulfillment, the type in the antetype, the sacrifice in the atonement, the shadow in the substance." \*

As might be expected, there are many legends concerning the birth and infancy of John, all of which bear abundant internal evidence of their unreliability, in this respect at least bearing a marked resemblance to the myths relating to the childhood of Jesus. One of these, which may be given as a fair specimen of all, is found in the apocryphal New Testament, and relates the marvelous escape of Elisabeth and her child from the fury of Herod's soldiers in the massa-

\* Comment on Luke i, 79.



cre of the innocents, and is as follows : “ Then Herod, perceiving that he was mocked by the wise men, and being very angry, commanded certain men to go and to kill all the children that were in Bethlehem, from two years old and under. But Mary, hearing that the children were to be killed, being under much fear, took the child, and wrapped him up in swaddling clothes, and laid him in an ox-manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. Elisabeth also, hearing that her son John was to be searched for, took him and went up into the mountains, and looked around for a place to hide him ; and there was no secret place to be found. Then she groaned within herself, and said, O mountain of the Lord, receive the mother with the child. For Elisabeth could not climb up. And instantly the mountain was divided and received them. And there appeared to them an angel of the Lord to preserve them. But Herod made search after John, and sent servants to Zacharias, when he was (ministering) at the altar, and said unto him, Where hast thou hid thy son ? He replied to them, I am a minister of God, and a servant of the altar ; how should I know where my son is ? So the servants went back and told Herod the whole ; at which he was incensed, and said, Is not this son of his like to be king in Israel ? He sent therefore again his servants to Zacharias, saying, Tell us the truth, where is thy son, for you know that your life is in my hand. So the servants went and told him all this. But

Zacharias replied to them, I am a martyr for God, and if he shed my blood, the Lord will receive my soul. Besides, know that ye shed innocent blood. However, Zacharias was murdered in the entrance of the temple and altar, and about the partition; but the children of Israel knew not when he was killed." \*

There is also a legend related by St. Bonaventura, who says that on the Virgin and Joseph leaving Egypt with the divine child they met the young Baptist on the skirts of the wilderness, near a gushing spring, and John acknowledged Christ as Lord, bending reverently before him, while Jesus gave the little St. John drink from a shell, saying, "I am the living water!"

The child John has always been a favorite in Christian art. The old masters were particularly fond of introducing him into their pictures of the Holy Family, with his little camel's-hair shirt, and cross, and scroll, kissing the feet or hand of the infant Saviour or kneeling or standing before him.

In Luini's fresco in the Church of Lugano the infant Child is playing with a lamb on the right of the Virgin, and on her left the child John points to the Saviour with hand outstretched and the fore-finger extended: "Behold!"

\* *The Protevangelion*, xvi. For further account of the legend concerning the death of Zacharias see foot-note at close of this chapter in *Apocryphal New Testament*. Translation printed for William Hone. London, 1820.

Murillo has left to the world a fine picture of St. John the Baptist, as a child embracing the lamb, and at the same time pointing to heaven. Leonardo and Rubens have each a charming picture of Christ and the infant Baptist playing together, caressing a lamb between them.

Mrs. Jameson says: "There is a celebrated picture by Guido, in which the young St. John, as he clasps his hands with a sort of timid, childish devotion before the Christ, is caressed and encouraged by Joseph. Such representations of the two holy children, sublime in their innocence—the one predestined to die for mankind, the other to prepare the way before him—have, as church pictures, an inexpressible beauty and significance, and might, I think, be multiplied among us with advantage to the young and old. We need sometimes to be reminded of the sacredness of childhood." \*

\* *History of Our Lord in Art.*

## CHAPTER V.

## JOHN'S BOYHOOD AND EARLY TRAINING.

OF the childhood of John we have no account beyond the very brief statement that he grew in physical strength and beauty under the fostering care of the mother, who was not only devoted to him as her first and only born, but as especially set apart for a most holy work. His mental development kept pace also with his physical growth, and he became remarkable for the symmetrical vigor of all his powers. Luke i, 80. There is no good reason to suppose that his retirement to the lonely life of an ascetic in the wilderness occurred until his boyhood was fully passed.

From the relationship and intimate friendship which existed between Mary and Elisabeth, there can be no doubt that John, occasionally, at least, met Jesus during their childhood and youth. The family gatherings so common among the Jews, and the passover feasts at Jerusalem (Luke ii, 41-52), furnished regular opportunities for the maintenance of a friendship which must have begun in their earlier years. The predictions concerning the future career of each must have been often referred to in the two households, and this naturally bound the boys

together by a more than common tie of sympathy and love, which was renewed in their brief association together at the time of Christ's baptism and attendance upon John's preaching, when John took occasion—after he had received the divine sign, for which he had reverently waited—to bear hearty and explicit testimony to his cousin's Messiahship.\*

During John's youth none of the wonders which attended his birth were renewed. Outwardly and inwardly his growth conformed to the common laws of infancy and childhood. During this formative period of life he enjoyed all the advantages of an ancient and, in the eyes of his countrymen, a noble ancestry. His parents possessed at least a modest competency, and, since they were fully aware of the important part he was to play in the future history of Israel, no doubt every opportunity was given him for a most thorough intellectual and moral development.

In the social life of Hebron his parents held a leading position. Their home was visited by the most learned and refined, who held them, and consequently their son, in the highest respect, and who

\* The word rendered *cousin* in Luke i, 36, may signify kindred of any degree, although in this case it probably is intended to signify that the mothers of Mary and Elisabeth were sisters. Such near relationship must have been on the maternal side, since on the paternal side (the father's descent determined the tribeship of a family) Mary was of the tribe of Judah, and Elisabeth of the tribe of Levi.



insensibly exerted over the lad a most favorable educating influence.

His genealogy could be traced in a direct line back, through fourteen centuries, to the days of the exodus, a line the history of which furnished many famous names and recorded many great and noble deeds.

Zacharias and Elisabeth were of necessity, and of choice as well, strict observers of the law; and, unquestionably, took good care that their son should be early inspired with a religious reverence for all fasts and feasts, for the Sabbath, and the synagogue, and the study of the Scriptures. He was taught to observe the multiplied rules concerning meats and drinks and dress, and all the particular acts and duties connected with every-day domestic, social, and religious life. While yet a child he fairly entered into the "slavery of ritualism," the chains of which were probably none the less galling because his parents' and kindred had felt their weight before him. He lived, and ate, and labored, and studied, and slept, and awoke by rule, the slightest deviation from which would be regarded as a sin, which, if persisted in, would be fatal to his enjoyment of the rights and privileges and honors of his caste. The son of a priest, he was destined, by law and by custom, for the priesthood, and often accompanied his father to the temple at Jerusalem, the glittering pinnacles of which he could see from the hill-tops of Hebron.

At such times he was carefully instructed in all the details of the temple service ; and he doubtless often made one in the circle of studious disciples gathered at the feet of the learned doctors of the law who daily taught in the sacred precincts. Such environments in youth must have had a powerful influence on his character.

The temple, newly built by Herod, was resplendent with purest marble and finest gold. Its smoking altars and white-robed priests ; the music of singing Levites, and cunning players on horns and harps and flutes and cymbals ; the countless throng of worshipers from all lands ; the costly sacrifices and offerings, and the proud spirit of the narrowest and most intolerant Judaism, all exerted a powerful influence upon his keen and reflective mind : an influence which, though more or less harmful at first, was to a great extent counteracted by the good sense and piety of his parents, and the special enlightenment of the Holy Spirit during his after life ; so that the knowledge thus early gained gave him at last a notable advantage as teacher and reformer. Pharisaism, bigotry, religious exclusiveness, ancestral pride, and the pomp and display of hypocrisy afterward received their severest denunciations and most cutting rebukes from one who was perfectly familiar with their sources and tendencies.

During John's childhood and early youth the instructions of home were probably supplemented by

attendance upon the school of some *hazzan*, or reader of the synagogue,\* followed by enrollment in one of the higher schools of the scribes, or *Soferim*. He probably obtained little if any knowledge of Greek, as that language was not much known in the hill-country of Judah, where the towns and cities were, for the most part, yet spared the presence of pagans. He had but little knowledge of and no sympathy with Greek culture, since it was prescribed by the Hebrew doctors of the law, who showed their contempt for it by denouncing, as equally vile and degraded, "he who breeds swine, and he who teaches his son the wisdom of the Greeks."† A most slavish study of the law and an unquestioning adoption of its precepts were alone considered worthy a serious-minded and cultured Hebrew.‡

According to the Talmud of Jerusalem, when a certain learned rabbi was asked what time it was proper to teach children "the wisdom of the Greeks," he replied: "At the hour which is neither day nor night, for it is written of the law: Thou shalt study it day and night."

The language of Palestine at that time was the Syriac dialect mixed with Hebrew. Matt. xxvii, 46; Mark iii, 17; v, 41; vii, 34; xiv, 36; Acts xxi, 37, 40; xxii, 2; xxvi, 14.

\* Mischna, *Schabbath*, i, 3.

† Mischna, *Sanhedrin*, xi, 1.

‡ Josephus, *Ant.*, xx, chap. xi, 2.

The young John probably came in contact with the "grotesque scholasticism" which was enrolling among its votaries so many of the learned at Jerusalem, and which soon became embodied in the Talmud; but it evidently made but little impression upon him, except to inspire him with disgust at its puerility, and to furnish him with additional weapons for his future attacks upon a false and degenerate Church.

His mind seemed to turn naturally to a careful study and contemplation of the Old Testament, particularly the prophets, since his life and character, and even his style as a preacher, were evidently formed upon these models. Like Elijah, and Elisha, and Nathan, and Ezekiel, he became a man of one idea. All his fiery eloquence, consuming zeal, and uncompromising hatred of hypocrisy; all his sharp reproofs of the prevailing national spirit, and rough pruning of the national character; were but the expression of his determination to make clean and faithful preparation for the new King and the new kingdom.

Like his predecessors in the prophetic office, from first to last, he neither lost sight of his especial mission nor permitted any personal consideration to stand in the way of its fulfillment, even in the minutest particular.

He never seemed to take much interest in the political events of the times, and he probably had but little knowledge of them. He no doubt shared to

some extent the national expectation touching the temporal power and glory of the Messiah; but unlike the mass of his countrymen he grasped the spiritual significance of the prophecies concerning the Christ, and he knew that in bringing to maturity his own sovereign plans and purposes Israel's God would take but little account of existing political combinations or necessities. When the Prince of Peace should mount his throne it would matter little whether Herod or the hierarchy ruled in Jerusalem, or who wielded the imperial scepter at Rome.

If he took any note of the continual seditions and intrigues that were agitating Jerusalem it was only because he regarded them as simply foreshadowing the great revolution so soon to burst upon the world, in which the new must "increase" and the old must "decrease," until He whose right it was to reign would be "Lord of lords and King of kings" forever.

What was the state of John's mind during these early years, and in just what manner his development progressed, we cannot tell, since no detailed record is left to us; but, judging by his after character and career, they must have been years of anxious expectation and, at times, intense excitement; years of the most conscientious preparation for the unique experiences of the wilderness and the great events which followed. Pressensé may be right when he says: "Doubtless the memorable events which had heralded John's birth were told him from his tenderest years;



but, not being elucidated then, as to us they are by the whole Gospel history, they would appear somewhat obscure to him, so much the more as we can hardly suppose Elisabeth and Zacharias to have possessed the same depth of religious intuition in the habitual course of their life as they had reached in the moment of inspiration. Again, great realities appear more or less indistinct when they are only beheld from a distance.\* But "the child is father to the man," and, unquestionably, his boyhood days were full of great thoughts and high resolves and careful discipline, inspired by the Holy Spirit, who overshadowed and directed him from his very birth. Luke i, 15.

John's heart was right, and his mental powers, through his early training, became well balanced and strong, capable of directing all his energies and wisdom to the accomplishment of a great and worthy object, else he never could have taken the place in history which he did, or exerted such a profound and controlling influence upon the minds of men. There is no truer saying than that "It has never been given to aberration or looseness of mind to produce a serious effect upon the progress of humanity."

From the very first John showed his religious bias. The influences which surrounded him in his home were higher than those of mere formalism. Both Zacharias and Elisabeth were "righteous before God,"

\* *Jesus Christ: His Life and Work*, p. 39.

a grace which includes real moral worth, as well as legal exactness and rabbinical blamelessness. Their piety was deep and sincere; more scriptural than Pharisaical, and therefore rare in that day. They fulfilled Micah's ideal of one accepted of God, for they did justly, loved mercy, and walked humbly with their God. Micah vi, 8. These noble characteristics their son inherited, or, at least, they were early implanted in his heart. From childhood his soul responded to the idea of living to purpose in the world. He early caught the true spirit of Hebrew heroism, which gave such zest to the study of the ancient Scriptures. He aspired to walk with God, as did Enoch; to be the "friend of God," as was Abraham; and to be called and commissioned of God, as was Samuel. He learned to regard the call to duty as imperative, to disdain self-indulgent ease, to lightly value worldly honors, and to look upon the accomplishment of his humble mission, as a simple herald of the truth, as the fulfillment of his loftiest conception of earthly success. In his wise and noble father he honored the priest, but gradually his whole soul turned toward the higher activities of a prophet, and he gladly determined to devote his whole life to the work of reform, and the revival of the religion of his fathers, that he might thus most effectually "prepare the way of the Lord." These resolves were intensified by the historical associations of the region in which he dwelt. Abraham's life of faith and faithfulness

would inspire his soul every time he approached the sacred cave of Machpelah. David's career stimulated all the romantic and heroic tendencies of his nature whenever he wandered over the hills of Hebron and the plains of Bethlehem, or satisfied his hunger with the wild honey of the rocks in the wilderness. The legitimate effect of all these influences of education and environment appears in John when, in the maturity of his powers, he enters upon his brief but amazing career as a preacher. He was, indeed, "strong in spirit." This was his chief characteristic. Every thing, even the haughty will of man, gave way before the life-purpose of this grand soul.

Luke's account of his parentage, his home, and the nature of his growth, though brief, furnishes foundation for all these reflections upon the boyhood of the Baptist; and we may also with propriety record here those words of the Koran which are so consistent with the Bible story :

"We [the angels] said unto John the son of Zacharias, O John, receive the book of the law with a resolution to study and observe it. And we bestowed on him wisdom while yet a child, and mercy from us, and purity of life; and he was a devout person, and dutiful toward his parents, and was not proud or rebellious. Peace be on him, the day whereon he was born, the day whereon he shall die, and the day whereon he shall be restored to life." \*

\* Sile's translation, chap. xix.

X The parents of John were well stricken in years at the time of his birth, and as nothing further is said of them in the brief narrative, we may justly conclude that both of them passed away before any thing remarkable took place in the life of their son. With the close of Luke's first chapter the story of his childhood is ended ; and when the narrative is again taken up long years have elapsed, and it is to a man of matured powers, trained mind, and disciplined soul that we are introduced. ✓

## CHAPTER VI.

## A NAZARITE.

JOHN was ordained to be a Nazarite from his birth, for the words of Gabriel were, "He shall drink neither wine nor strong drink." Luke i, 15. The word is from *nazir*, and denotes that he was devoted, by vow, to certain abstinences. The chosen forerunner of the Messiah and herald of his kingdom was required to forego the ordinary pleasures and indulgences of the world, and live a life of the strictest self-denial, several years of which, at least, were to be spent in retirement, if not in actual solitude.

The Jewish Nazarite was one of either sex who, for a particular reason, was consecrated to God as peculiarly his. Although the idea of abstinence and self-mortification for religious ends has always prevailed among Oriental nations, it is useless to search for a foreign origin of the Nazarite vow as described in the Old and New Testament Scriptures. It has, to be sure, some things in common with similar vows among the heathen; but in its true spirit and ends it is so closely associated with the peculiar ideas and practices of the Hebrews that it must be regarded as a legitimate outgrowth of the religious life of that



remarkable people. It was embodied in Israelitish practice from the very earliest times, but the laws regulating the Nazarites were not formulated and regularly proclaimed until the days of Moses. From these laws, as recorded in Numbers vi, we learn that the Nazarite must be a total abstainer from wine and all intoxicating drinks. He was not even permitted to use vinegar or any preparation of the grape whatever. Grapes and raisins were forbidden. In short, he could "eat nothing that is made from the vine-tree, from the kernels even to the husks." Thus, while vinous stimulus was regarded by other nations as an appointed and sacred means of religious and supernatural inspiration, Hebrew legislation condemned excess, honored sobriety, and even exalted total abstinence, on the part, at least, of those who aspired to lead a particularly holy life, to the rank of a cardinal virtue.

All the days of his vow no razor was to touch the Nazarite's head. His hair and beard must be permitted to grow unhindered even by the ordinary process of trimming. If, as some suppose, the Hebrew word for diadem contains the original idea of *nazir*, this unhindered growth of hair was probably regarded as a kind of crown to distinguish one who was honored by being consecrated to God. To touch it, therefore, with knife or razor, and so by man's invention to interfere with God's work, was a profanation not to be tolerated.

A most striking resemblance to this Jewish custom is found among the modern Persians.

Morier says: "It frequently happens after the birth of a son that if the parent be in distress or the child be sick, or if there be any other cause of grief, the mother makes a vow that no razor shall come upon the child's head for a certain period of time, and sometimes for all his life. If the child recovers and the cause of grief be removed, and if the vow be but for a time, so that the mother's vow be fulfilled, then she shaves his head at the end of the time prescribed, makes a small entertainment, collects money and other things from her relations and friends, which are sent as *nezers* (offerings) to the mosque at Kerbelah, and are there consecrated." \*

The Jewish Nazarite was not permitted to go near any dead body, not even that of his father, mother, brother, or sister, lest, after being consecrated to God, he became ceremonially "unclean." If by accident or any circumstances beyond his control he came in contact with the dead, it required seven days of cleansing, in the observance of many ceremonies, and the presentation before the Lord of a special trespass-offering, to rid him of his defilement. His head was shaved, and since his vow was regarded as broken he had to solemnly renew it and begin anew its strict fulfillment.

The Nazarite vow was usually made for a limited

\* Morier's *Second Journey*, p. 109.

time (Acts xxi, 23, 24), but sometimes it was for life. In this manner parents sometimes consecrated their unborn children to God's special service, as a life-long obligation. We have an illustration of this not only in Zacharias and Elisabeth, but in the parents of Samuel and Samson; and according to tradition in the early Church, James the Just, the brother of our Lord, was thus bound to Jehovah's service.\*

The Nazaritish vow was not permitted for less than thirty days, otherwise impulsive persons might fall into the practice of taking it too often, and thereby diminish its solemn character.†

In the Jewish Nazarite we find, however, no warrant or precedent for the Romish anchorite or monk, with his vain show of selfish devotion, and his unmanly shirking of the ordinary responsibilities of life. The Nazarites, with the exception of a few who no doubt carried their self-denial to a most unwarrantable extreme, only denied themselves certain indulgences, and separated themselves from certain customs, that they might honor God and fulfill their special vows, while at the same time they were free to enjoy social and family and business life like other men, and to engage in all useful vocations.

“The shrinking avoidance of all Levitical defilement, which dictated such mortifications, was held due to their special consecration to God, whom such

\* Euseb., *H. E.*, ii, 23, 2.

† Josephus, *War*, ii, 15, 1; *Mischna, Nazir*, i. 3; iii, 1; vi, 3.

rigid ceremonial purity was supposed to honor. The shunning the sight of the dead was but a repetition of what was required from the levitically holiest man of the nation—the high-priest. The abstaining from wine and strong drink guarded against an offense doubly evil in one who had given himself to God, and was a security for vigor and clearness of mind in his service. The uncut hair was, perhaps, a visible sign of the sacred and inviolable surrender of the whole man to Jehovah. The hair was the symbol of manly vigor, its crown and ornament; and its untouched locks symbolized the consecration of the reason and higher powers to God. Thus especially ‘holy,’ the life-long Nazarite stood on an equality with a priest, and might enter the inner temple, as we see in the instance of James the Just. The time of Samson and Samuel, toward the close of the period of the Judges, seems to have been that of the greatest glory of Nazaritism, which prepared the way for the grander era of the prophets, beginning with Samuel, and for the great spiritual movement of the reign of the first kings. Less than two hundred years after David, however, Amos laments the mockery with which the people treated it. Yet Nazarites must always have been numerous in Israel, . . . though the vitality of the institution must have declined. ‘I never, through life,’ said Simon the Just (about B. C. 300) ‘liked to taste the trespass-offering of a Nazarite. Once, however, a man of the South came to me who

had made the Nazarite vow. I looked at him. He had glorious eyes, a noble face, and his hair fell over his shoulders in great waving masses. "Why do you wish to cut off this magnificent hair and be a Nazarite no longer?" I asked him. "I am a shepherd to my father," said he, "in the town where I live. One day, in drawing water from the spring, I saw my likeness below, and felt a secret pride. An evil thought began to lay hold on me and destroy me. Then I said, Wicked creature! you would fain be proud of what is not yours, and ought to be no more to you than dust and worthlessness; I vow to my God that I will cut off my hair for his glory." Forthwith, continued Simon, 'I embraced him and said, Would that we had many Nazarites like thee in Israel!'"\*

A careful study of the lives of Samson, Samuel, John, and others makes it evident to us that the Nazarite's abstinence and self-denial were not altogether for his own good, but he sought thereby to benefit the people by inspiring them to like profitable temperance and self-control. The evil of gross indulgence of the bodily appetites has always characterized Eastern society, and it was, in part at least, to meet and overcome this tendency that these men, consecrated especially to God, set the example they did.

Christ was not a Nazarite, but, coming as a model to show men how to heed and profit by the preaching of John, so far as the manner of life is concerned, he

\* Geikie's *Life and Words of Christ*, pp. 359, 360, with references.



set a most worthy and safe example in the right use of all God's temporal bounty.

The law of Christian Nazaritism is plainly and concisely laid down by Paul in 1 Cor. viii, 13: "Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend." Dr. Whedon aptly says: "Our modern temperance societies are properly a Christian Nazaritism. They are a model *enterprise* aiming to raise the public practice to a standard of temperance by exhibiting an abstinence from even an otherwise innocent measure of indulgence."

## CHAPTER VII.

## IN THE WILDERNESS.

ACCORDING to a legend of the early Church, John was a child of about seven years old when he became a dweller in the desert. This receives some little color from the expression in Luke i, 80. In art John the Baptist in the wilderness is treated sometimes as a child, sometimes as a youth, praying, or meditating, or attended by angels. In the Prato Series, by Fra Filippo, the lonely, beautiful boy is praying devoutly with upraised eyes, in the midst of a rocky solitude; or, as by Bugiardini, in the gallery at Bologne, as a youth he sits with his mystical cup by a stream gushing from the rock; or, as by Giulio Romano, seated as a child, he plucks a root from the ground, which expresses his abstinence; or, kneeling by the Jordan in a spiritual ecstasy, he sees a vision of the Messiah in the opening heavens above.\*

It is quite impossible to determine at just what time John's life as a recluse began; but we are certain, from the little that is said, that at least in his very early manhood he acquired personal independence. Taught from infancy that he was in due time

\* Mrs. Jameson.

to become a prophet of the Lord, and to be directly connected with the fulfillment of the great hope of the nation, his mind must have often been filled with great thoughts, to the cherishing of which intercourse with ordinary men and the ordinary affairs of life was unfavorable. And, too, there must have been great conflicts of soul at times, when the claims of God and the claims of the world were arrayed against each other. He looked for the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord, for the advent of the King of glory; and this alone was sufficient to lift him to a mental and moral plane so much above the life about him that its worldly spirit became oppressive and even offensive to him. His life as a Nazarite was out of harmony with the selfishness of the times; so, at last and inevitably, he was driven away from the noise and bustle and strife of the city, to the quiet and seclusion of the "desert," or, more properly, the thinly inhabited rural region of his native hill-country.\*

The simplicity of such a life was irresistible to one of his temperament and purposes. Its calm retirement was favorable to the special preparation upon which he must now enter for the great work to which God would soon call him, as a preacher of repentance, to walk in the honored footsteps and exemplify the true spirit and power of Elijah. "It is no secret

\* See remarks on "desert," Whedon on Luke i, 80; Lange on Matt. iii, 1; McClintock & Strong, "*John*."





Wilderness of Judea.



that God's plan of preparation of those whom he calls to be leaders is obscurity for a season, *retirement in the wilderness*, and into the solitude of patient toil, into the unnoticed work of individual sacrifice. Into the wilderness went Moses, where forty years were given to preparation for the leadership of a people; into the wilderness went Paul, where for three years he was disciplined in intellectual and spiritual strength; out of the wilderness came Elijah, strong as the mountains of Moab, consuming as the flames of Carmel; out of the wilderness came the Church, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners; from the wilderness came John, echoing the past and voicing the advent of a new dispensation. In Mohammed's life, too, 'it is only at the end of long and solitary vigils in the desert that the vision comes which seals him for his work.' \*\*

In the same interesting line of thought F. L. Ewell says of John Wiclif: "He spent some twenty-five years in Oxford, in seclusion so far as our knowledge goes. During all those years we catch only shadowy and uncertain glimpses of him. But these years of obscurity laid the foundations of his subsequent greatness. In them he learned how to wear his invincible armor and to wield his mighty weapons. Here he mastered the science and the logic and the philosophy of his day. It was this quarter of a century that made

\* Dr. J. W. Mendenhall, in *Echoes from Palestine*, p. 157.

him, in the language of his bitter enemy, Knyghton, 'as a philosopher second to none, and as a school-man incomparable.' Best of all, it was doubtless during this long period that he acquired his astonishing familiarity with the Scriptures, and gained that love for them and reverence for their authority which were destined to lead him so much further than he then dreamed. Wellington said that Waterloo was won at Eton; meaning, I suppose, that the discipline of school-days prepared the way for that great victory. So we may ascribe the rich fruit of Wiclif's later years to that quarter of a century of quiet obscurity." \*

John's soul found needed repose in the solitude. The discords of the great world were left behind. Study of God's word, meditation, submission to the teachings and leadings of the Holy Spirit, an attitude of soul in harmony with the designs of the coming Christ, worship and prevailing prayer, all nourished his spiritual life and enriched his spiritual experience.

Such retirement from the active associations of the world as a settled manner of life is cowardly, and contrary to God's order. The true Christian soldier will not hide from the conflict any more than the strong wing of the eagle will remain quietly folded in its lonely nest. "The man who enters into the kingdom of heaven learns how to be in contact with the world, and yet not to be polluted by it. He does

\* *Andover Review*, February, 1885. p. 152.

not avoid the sin of excessive attachment to worldly kindred by literally forswearing that attachment, but, what is better, by restraining it within its proper bounds. It has been said that the best safeguard against temptation is distance from temptation. But this maxim is unworthy the man of a truly Christian courage. The one who actually confronts the enemy and overcomes him deserves more honor than he who remains unhurt by shunning the sight of the foe." \*

Even devotional enjoyments which do not plainly help us to better work and higher usefulness should be regarded with suspicion. Temporary retirement for meditation, prayer and study is only enjoined in Scripture for the development of strength to grapple with and overcome the practical evils of active life. As the eloquent Chinese preacher Sia Sek Ong said: "We cannot go on the mountain-top and build three tents and *stay there*. We must come down among the leprous, blind, lame, starving multitudes."

With John, however, the seclusion of his early years was most worthy because most favorable to the peculiar training necessary for his peculiar mission, which should open as soon as, in soul as well as body, he had attained to full and perfect manhood.

The pure Hebrew faith and worship had nothing in common with the ascetic principle. True religion, as well as true civilization, has no place or use for asceticism; and John had no sympathy with, much

\* *Bib. Sacra*, 1877, p. 179.

less could he have been a member of, the order of Essenes, which flourished in his times, and counted its representatives by the hundreds, hidden away in the caves and glens and thickets of the very hill-country and wilderness with which his new manner of life now made him familiar. Like the Essenes he remained unmarried, denied himself all luxuries, and "showed a prophet-like grandeur in his standard of aim and practice;" but he was no more an Essene than he was a Pharisee, for he denounced the spirit and aim of both. He was no mere self-lover. He was not afraid of men, neither did he fear pollution from their presence. He loved men and righteousness; and, when God's time came, he in the most unselfish manner devoted all his powers to the work of lifting men up and making them better because more righteous. The Essenes bound themselves for life to solitude and the most rigid forms of asceticism; but John was in retirement for a few years only, and that not for the sake of such a life itself, but for the sake of a great work to be done among men and their rulers afterward. Pressensé well says: "Nothing can be more false than to represent John the Baptist as an Oriental ascetic, a sort of fakir. He was an utter stranger to that Indian doctrine which places the principle of evil in the body and not in the soul, and which seeks salvation in asceticism. He was a preacher of repentance. Sin was, in his eyes, essentially a moral deviation, and not a fatality of the

physical nature. He hated evil with such an intense hatred only because he saw in it a free act. So far from pretending to urge man to self-annihilation as the secret of his own salvation, he never ceased to invoke and proclaim the true Deliverer. He sought in solitude a haven for prayer—a place of retirement in which to prepare, under the secret eye of God, for his momentous mission. His austerity was no rule, no imposed observance; it was the very expression of his deep spiritual life. He wrapped himself in a rough mantle of camel's hair, and fed on locusts and wild honey, only because the great thought which absorbed him left no place for minor considerations.”\*

The Essenes hated flesh, but John ate without scruple the locust of the desert. His preaching plainly and forcibly shows that he had no love for the unmanly idea that the soul was to be saved and the life made pure by forsaking the world. He declared that the kingdom of heaven was at hand, and, in principles which were afterward more thoroughly developed and explained by Christ himself, he taught that it was to be a kingdom on earth, among men, to include all common life, and to find its willing, happy subjects in the homes and amid the affairs of every-day existence.

Such a life as John led in the wilderness may attract men for very different reasons. It may feed

\* *Jesus Christ: His Life and Work*, p. 41.



and satisfy an arrogant spirit which cynically holds itself aloof from and superior to all other men; or it may serve as an antidote to the feeling of disgusted satiety which torments the worn debauchee or Epicurean. It may even satisfy the religious feeling of one who is afflicted with spiritual laziness, or one who is selfishly intent on his own salvation alone. But John's great and only desire was to fulfill a destiny bright with hope and glowing with expectation; and he became a dweller in the wilderness for the sake of others, that he might thereby become a worthy prophet of God. Study, meditation and prayer kindled a divine light in his soul, but it shone forth not to promote his own glory, not to draw the eyes of men to himself, but to effectually guide them to the saving glory of the coming kingdom and its divine-human King.

His whole life and work, when at last he stood before the people, proved that he was no monk, since he evidently had crowded the years with the right kind of study and thought; that he was no mystic, since his system of theology was not a dream, but a living, glowing, soul-moving reality; that he was no misanthrope, since, although he dealt severely with men's sins, he gave every possible evidence of a fervent love for the race and a bright hope for its earthly future.

If a man would lift up his fellows he must take his stand nearer to God than they. For a time, at

least, he must be separate from them. That he might attain to this vantage-ground in the quickest and best manner, the Holy Spirit led John away where his yearning heart not only cried out for God unhindered, but where it effectually found him.

If a man would lead his fellows to victory over sin and error, he must first become a conqueror himself. So John went into the wilderness, like Christ himself, to grapple with the sinfulness of his own nature, to wage war against the greatest enemies of his own soul. When at last he came forth he was covered with the scars of many a hard-fought battle. He had the voice and the tread and the bravery of a conquering hero. He had the hard-won power of a great commander. He could inspire men with his own marvelous zeal and hope, he could lead them to successful conflict with the spirit and power of the world.

Year after year of his retirement he "waxed strong in spirit." In the conquest of self he gathered strength for others. In communion with the Holy Spirit, and in habitual surrender to the divine will, he learned to trust every thing to the power and demonstration of God. He learned to gather up all his soul-powers and to concentrate them as an irresistible force in the grand but brief work of his life.

John's life in the wilderness continued for the space of several years at least. No man ever became

a great moral hero in a day. Under favorable influences he must grow up into such gifts and graces. The call of God rang louder and clearer in John's soul with each passing year, until, at last, with bodily appetites subdued, unworthy passions controlled, mind developed, heart purified and responsive to the real wants of men, "and his whole being raised to a lofty invincibility of purpose, he felt equal to taking the sublimest and most terrible position into which a frail man could be raised by the Almighty—that of the herald predicted by his favorite Isaiah, to pioneer the way for the Messiah of God. He was to fill up the valleys, and make low the mountains and hills, to make the crooked places straight, and the rough places even; that is, to rebuke the lofty and proud, to raise up the humble and oppressed, to spare none of the crooked policies and ways of men, and to smooth down their roughness by a hearty repentance, so as to fit them for the peaceful entrance of the Christ." \*

\* Geikie's *Life and Words of Christ*, vol. i, p. 383.

## CHAPTER VIII.

MANNER OF JOHN'S LIFE IN THE WILDERNESS, AND ITS  
INFLUENCE UPON HIM.

IN harmony with his surroundings and the sacred mission for which he was now in training, John's manner of life in the wilderness was simplicity itself. No doubt he was supplied with every thing necessary to his comfort and health, during his term of seclusion and study, in that warm climate and among a people of simple habits. But he indulged in no superfluities, and every thing was of the plainest kind. Whether he dwelt in a house or in one of the numerous rocky caves of the region we cannot tell; but in either case he was comfortably lodged. His dress was by no means insufficient, but it was plain and common in quality, such as was made and worn only by the very poorest of the population. Matt. iii, 4. His garments were of camel's hair woven into cloth by the rude art of the country-side.

The hair about the hump and back of the camel is closely shorn once or twice a year. Of the finest hair a very elegant cloth is made in some parts of the East, called *camel*. An imitation of this is manufactured in Europe and America of common sheep's

wool. The longer hair the Arab women spin and weave into a coarse but close and thick fabric, sometimes black and sometimes in black and white stripes, which, though somewhat harsh and rough to the touch, is not only very serviceable, but a most complete protection from the elements. Of this coarse cloth is made the burnoose, or long, loose outer garment with a sort of hood attached, invariably worn by the Bedouins. The long, low black tents of the Arab encampments, with which every traveler in Palestine and Moab is familiar, are also made of this cloth, which is impervious to the rain and much stouter than either cotton or woolen stuff. *Psa. cxx, 5; Cant. i, 5; Isa. xiii, 20.*

This simple but comfortable flowing garment was bound around John's waist by a strong leathern belt, such as has always been in use among the common people of that country. His long, Samson-like hair was probably surmounted by a triangular piece of cloth for a head-covering, kept in its place by a cord passed around the head, as is still the custom every-where among the natives of Syria and Arabia. His feet were protected from contact with the jagged rocks by coarse sandals made of camel's skin, and fastened with thongs or small cords of brown camel's hair.\*

John subsisted upon the simple food used by the poor people of that region. He ate dried locusts,

\* Van Lennep's *Bible Lands*, p. 406.



which were "clean" under the Mosaic law (Lev. xi, 22), and the honey of wild bees which abounded in the clefts of the rocks, and his healthful drink was pure water trickling from the springs or stored up, after the rains, in the rocky hollows. This plain fare was nourishing, and highly favorable to vigor of body and clearness of mind.

The eastern locusts have been used for food from time immemorial (Lev. xi, 21) by the common people throughout Africa, Arabia, and Persia, and especially by the Bedouins of the desert. They are exposed for sale, for this purpose, in the markets of Medina, Bagdad, and even in Damascus.\* Tristram speaks of them as "very palatable," † and any traveler in the Jordan valley or in Moab may satisfy his curiosity upon this point by accepting the hearty hospitality of his chance acquaintances in any Arab encampment. Following substantially the description given by Dr. Thomson and Dr. Van Lennep, ‡ supplemented by my own observation, it appears that when, at certain times, the locusts come down upon the face of the earth crowds of people go forth and collect vast numbers of them, even loading horses and cattle with the booty. In preparing them for eating they are first thrown alive into boiling water with which a great deal of salt has been mixed. When

\* Burekhardt; Van Lennep, p. 319.

† *Natural History of the Bible*, p. 308.

‡ *Land and Book*, p. 420; *Bible Lands*, pp. 313-319.

sufficiently impregnated with the brine they are taken out, and the heads, feet, and wings are removed, after which they are thoroughly dried in the sun and packed away in sacks for future use. They are sometimes eaten boiled in butter and spread on unleavened bread, when they resemble shrimps in taste ; but more commonly they are roasted and then ground to a powder, which is mixed with flour and water, or flour and *dibs* from the boiled juice of the grape, and made into little cakes as a substitute for bread when flour is scarce. In the wilderness of Judea several kinds of locusts abound, in the dry season more particularly, and spring up with a drumming sound before you at almost every step, spreading their bright hind wings of scarlet, crimson, blue, yellow, white, green, or brown, according to the species. At times, however, they become so numerous as to fly in clouds that fairly darken the heavens, and become a scourge to the lands they visit.

The multitudinous wild flowers which cover Palestine like a variegated carpet in the spring-time, and the aromatic thymes, mints, and other similar plants, furnish abundant material for the wild bees which have always abounded there ; and the dry recesses of the rocks, found almost every-where, and particularly in the wilderness, afford them shelter and hiding-places for their comb and young. Vast quantities of this palatable food are still gathered there every year and stored in skins for home use, or carefully cleansed

and prepared for the market.\* This fact not only gives us an intelligent idea of John's wholesome fare, but recalls the frequent descriptions of Palestine in the Bible as a "land flowing with milk and honey," and enables us to understand, among many similar narratives, that which Samuel gives of the hungry men of Israel, when "all they of the land came to a wood; and there was honey upon the ground. And when the people were come into the wood, behold, the honey dropped." 1 Sam. xiv, 25, 26.

By his abstemiousness in contenting himself with this exceedingly plain though nutritious food, no doubt John intended to represent a perpetual fast. "John here presents the symbols of the repentance he preaches, according to ancient customs. The hair, or sackcloth, the fasting, and the solitude were the ordinary signs of deepest humiliation. The whole process was a mode of saying, 'We confess ourselves by sin unworthy of every blessing, even of food and raiment, and deserving to be sunk into humiliation and woe.' And John did not this for himself, but for the people. He was their representative. He was showing them by sign as well as by word what they ought to be and do. At the same time, by retreating from all society, he was protesting against the unutterable apostasy of the whole social system." †

Every true, great life will, sooner or later, find its wilderness. Full mental and moral stature is not

\* *Natural Hist. of Bible*, p. 324.

† Whedon on Matt. iii, 4.

reached there, but a foundation is laid, in such an experience, for the success and usefulness that are sure to follow. Says Bishop Horne: "He who desires to undertake the office of guiding others in the ways of wisdom and holiness will best qualify himself for that purpose by first passing some time in a state of sequestration from the world, where anxious cares and delusive pleasures may not break in upon him, to dissipate his attention; where no skeptical nor sectarian spirit may blind his understanding, and nothing may obstruct the illumination from above; where every vicious inclination may be mortified through grace, by a prudent application of the proper means, and every fresh bud of virtue, sheltered from noxious blasts, may be gradually reared up into strength, beauty, and fragrance; where, in a word, *he may grow and wax strong in spirit until the day of his showing unto Israel.*"

On the other hand, the selfishness and unholy tendency of the monastic idea is justly censured by Milton, when he says: "I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised and unbreathed, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but shirks out of the race, where the immortal garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat. Assuredly we bring not innocence into the world; we bring impurity much rather; that which purifies us is trial; and trial is by what is contrary."\*

\* *Areopagitica.*

Before his retirement from society John's circumstances were peculiarly favorable to a correct knowledge of the condition and needs of his people. They were in the hands of strong enemies. Their bitter cry arose to heaven for deliverance. The true hearted among them desired no king but God, and no authority but his law. They looked and longed for the Messiah. But the multitudes were full of sins which pressed heavily upon John's heart. At times the very shadow of death lay upon him. Luke i, 79. He saw that God had forsaken the people because they had first forsaken him. The holy temple, where once was seen the sign of Jehovah's presence and favor, had become a den of thieves. Mark xi, 17. Even the spiritual teachers of the people were so ignorant and corrupt as to be a hinderance rather than a help to their disciples. They were indeed blind leaders of the blind (Matt. xv, 14), creating artificial sins and an artificial conscience. The very priests of God, who should have been holy, were a scorn and a by-word among both Jews and Romans for their utter unworthiness. They had diluted and perverted the national ritual until it had utterly lost its primal vigor and significance, and become an enemy to true religion. Caste had grown into the proportions of a curse. The Pharisee, at one end of the social line, looked with scorn upon the publican at the other end, whom he could not even touch and remain clean; while the publican in turn hated the



Pharisee with a bitter hatred. The priest and the Levite could not help a poor dog of a Samaritan, though he had fallen among thieves, and was stripped and wounded and half dead, lest the act of compassion should make them unholy. And so men were taught that to be one of "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" was to be worse than a heathen; an out-cast unworthy the search and the care of the shepherd. The free spirit of the law was forgotten in a most servile slavery to the perverted letter of the same.

While still in his teens John had seen the high-priesthood polluted by nine different time-serving, proud, and even vicious incumbents, elevated to power by the will of a degenerate Jewish king, or the whim of a heathen governor from Rome, in direct defiance of the national law and traditions.\* It was, indeed, "an evil and adulterous generation," worse in the sight of God than either Sodom or Nineveh which he had cursed and destroyed. Matt. x, 15; xi, 24; xii, 39, 41; Mark viii, 38. Christ's severest sayings were not mere figures of speech.

From his wilderness retreat the young man John now looked down upon this strange, sad condition of his country, as from a high watch-tower. He was sufficiently aloof from these evils not to be personally injured by them, and yet sufficiently near to understand their true nature; and his heart, which beat

\* Josephus, *Ant. of the Jews*, Books xv-xviii.

in most tender sympathy with his race, sought anxiously for a remedy.

He was a true prophet of the Lord. His soul glowed with the intense fire of a wise and holy zeal, and he was inevitably directed to right thinking as a preparation for right acting. Of John in the wilderness, awaiting the Lord's pleasure, Canon Farrar eloquently says: "Almost from boyhood he had been a voluntary hermit. In solitude he had learned things unspeakable; there the unseen world had become to him a reality; there his spirit had caught 'a touch of fantasy and flame.' Communing with his own great lonely heart—communing with the high thoughts of that long line of prophets, his predecessors, to a rebellious people—communing with the utterances that came to him from the voice of the mountain and the sea—he had learned a deeper lore than he could have ever learned at Hillel's or Sham-mai's feet. In the tropic noonday of that deep Jordan valley, where the air seems to be full of a subtle and quivering flame—in listening to the howl of the wild beasts in the long night, under the luster of stars 'that seemed to hang like balls of fire in a purple sky'—in wandering by the sluggish cobalt-colored waters of that dead and accursed lake, until before his eyes, dazzled by the saline efflorescence of the shore strewn with its wrecks of death, the ghosts of the guilty seemed to start out of the sulphurous ashes under which they were submerged—he had

learned a language, he had received a revelation, not vouchsafed to ordinary men—attained, not in the schools of the rabbis, but in the school of solitude, in the school of God.”\*

Pressensé, also, seems to justly enter into John's thoughts at this period when he says: “He had read in the desert, as none had yet done in Israel, that book, at once bitter and sweet, which is the very book of God. Doubtless he still imaged the future to himself in the colors of the past; his spirit had not broken the theocratic mold; but nothing was more foreign to his heart than the dreams of political agitation which so often stirred his countrymen to revolt. He looked for a revolution in the conscience, for the yoke which weighed him down was not that of Rome, but of sin. The deliverance, in his eyes, must be of the nature of the bondage, and assume a moral character. He might have attained a much wider popularity if he had used his fervent words in the service of the passions of his compatriots, for these had been wrought up to the last degree, since the definite annexation of Judea to Syria, which involved the loss of the last shadow of independence till then retained. But the prophet's mission never was to follow the tide of the multitude, but to stem it. When the time comes for John the Baptist to attack the powers that be, he will do it in the name of the God whom they outrage; he will use no other weapon

\* *Life of Christ*, chap. viii.

but his word. Thus material force will have no power over his testimony, which will stand forever, like all that belongs to the higher order of spirits." \*

As John searched the Scriptures, and meditated, and prayed, the conviction grew clearer and stronger in his soul that the only way of escape for his countrymen was the way which led to the re-establishment of the kingdom of God, with the Messiah at its head. And that was the way of repentance for sin, putting away of iniquity by all classes, works which would evidence such repentance and cleansing, and a hearty devotion to the will and service of God. His soul was, at last, filled with the belief that if the people would thus heartily turn to God, not only would the Messiah come, but in God's own wise way they should be delivered from their oppressors, and the final results of their sin and degeneracy be averted. His struggles of soul became intensely real, and no doubt he pleaded with God night and day, in prayers and tears and sore fastings, that he would have mercy upon his chosen though apostate children, and send the promised deliverer. Like Moses, he was a true patriot, and, innocent of even one selfish thought, he prayed, and planned, and labored only for the purity and prosperity of his countrymen.

Christ "in the days of his flesh offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears," for

\* *Jesus Christ: His Life and Work*, p. 43.

a sinning and captive world, and we are certain that before his day his inspired herald learned well the way of lonely prayer and importunate pleading and "obstinate faith," as in the desert he also was "waiting for the consolation of Israel; and the Holy Ghost was upon him." Luke ii, 25.

At last there came to him a profound and controlling conviction that the long-expected Messiah was near at hand, and he became impatient to proclaim his advent. While he "was musing the fire burned" (Psa. xxxix, 3), and his impetuous nature could scarcely brook further restraint. Like the trained and vigorous warrior when the battle is joined, he longed to be up and away; until, at the last, it taxed to the utmost all his patience, fortitude, and self-control—disciplined as they were by years of trial in the city and the solitude—to curb his fiery zeal while he listened for the Holy Spirit's almighty "Go ye," which was to send him out as the equipped and flaming herald of the new day of purity and peace.

John in the wilderness was a most fascinating theme for the graceful and vigorous Irving, who wrote of this period of preparation: "It was a noble training for the rebuker and reprover of a world, for a greatly endowed and virtuously disposed mind hath nothing to fear from solitude. Our Saxon Alfred came forth from his shepherd concealment recruited by meditation with his own soul, with nature, and with nature's God, and refreshed for the deliverance



of England. Gustavus Vasa of Sweden came forth from his concealment among the miners of Dalecarlia, and overthrew in the strength of severe virtue the oppression of the Dane. Hoffer, whose name is holy in the bosom of oppressed ones over the face of Europe, before he made his demonstration for the Tyrolese retired to the loneliest mountain of the Alps and dwelt many days apart from men, feeding upon the milk of a goat, his only companion, and then came forth purified from all sinister intention by communion with his Maker, to whom, unlike our home-bred patriots and reformers, he did devote his whole soul; and he ceased not from the work to which he had girded up his soul until the earth beneath his scaffold drank the blood which no bribes of the usurper could corrupt. And so also of religion it hath been found; for religion and freedom are twin-sisters, which may never be parted without risk to both. Christ, after his baptism and setting apart [during his forty days' sojourn in the wilderness], doubtless counted the cost of his undertaking. Paul, being called, retired three years no one knows whither, and came forth to shatter the theology and customs of Judea, Greece, and Rome. Luther came forth from his temporary concealment, like a lion from his den, to roar in the teeth of all his foes. Knox meditated with his noble soul his pious work of reformation while he was lashed to the oar like a convict upon the rivers of France, and from his place of

banishment he blew the first blast of his trumpet; after which he returned, like a flame of pure fire, to set his country in a blaze of religious ardor, and, like a pillar of fire, to guide them in their most glorious work.

“And what is there good that cometh not out of suffering? and what is there great that cometh not out of self-denial? what is there new in knowledge or in virtue that cometh not out of solitary thought? and what is there noble and lasting in purpose that cometh not out of long nursing and strengthening in the secret chambers of the mind?

“Now John had given unto him the most terrible office of attacking every thing in society’s customs which might impede the progress and success of Him that was to follow after. It was needful, therefore, that he should be armed at every point to meet opposition, that he should have nothing to lose but his life, and nothing that he cared for but the end and object of his mission. Therefore, he was taught to brave life’s hated extremities; abstemiousness was his highest feast, and I doubt not hunger and thirst were his familiar friends; and looking upon the wild beasts of the desert, he would not fear the face of an infuriated man or a blood-thirsty woman. And what lessons of Providence he would learn during these trials and troubles of his forlorn estate! For without many such interferences, he must have perished utterly. And what time for conning the word of God,

and holding communion with Him that was with his people forty years in the wilderness!

“And what a nursery for schooling the young Nazarite into contempt for those stately forms and cunning disguises in which sin doth prank herself, the vanities, the affectations, the pomp and circumstance and painted decorations, under which wickedness hides her shocking head and vile, deformed person! What a school for the severe and terrible moods of the Spirit which he was called to utter; what a rough training for a rough prophet! He was to weep with no lamentation, like Jeremiah; he was not to ride in the chariot of the sublime, like Isaiah; or clothe himself with the cloudy mysteriousness of Ezekiel, nor flee like Jonah; but he was to strike home at every thrust the point-blank of his rebuke; was to shake and shiver and demolish the retreats of self-esteem. He was to lay every man a wreck upon the waves, and disappoint him thoroughly of all his bravery, and bring all to one common confessional, and make them passive under the same rebuke, and submit them to the same humiliating rite of washing and cleansing. He was to spare no living wight; the portals of the palace were not to be sacred against the spiritual leveler, nor beautiful women to be sacred from his uncivil tongue. If such a preacher was to appear again, even here in this Christian island, leaving rule aside, and striking into the bosom of every corruption the land groaneth under, why, the relig-

ious would disown him, saying that he was no preacher of the peaceful Jesus, and the irreligious would wag their heads at him in scorn, and power would libel him, and a prison or worse would be his certain doom." \*

\* Edward Irving's Works, iii, 21-23.

## CHAPTER IX.

## JOHN'S PUBLIC MINISTRY.

“So close is glory to our dust,  
So near is God to man;  
When duty whispers low, ‘Thou must,’  
The youth replies, ‘I can.’”—EMERSON.

AT length the moment came for John to quit his retirement. The near appearance of the Messiah had doubtless been revealed to him (John i, 33; Luke i, 17), and the voice of God sounded like a trumpet-call in his soul, commanding him to seek the haunts of men and proclaim the expected Deliverer, who should come as a Judge to the impenitent and rebellious, but as a merciful Saviour to the contrite and obedient.

John's commission came not from high-priest or Sanhedrin, but was sent directly from heaven, for “the word of God came unto him” as he waited in the wilderness. It was a most welcome summons, and John girded up his loins for the coming conflict with a manly promptness which was the expression of a zeal according to knowledge and divine inspiration.

The Messiah's hour had struck, and the herald was



impatient to declare it to Israel. He knew well what prejudice, and ignorance, and hypocrisy, and subtle sinfulness he would have to encounter; but he was "a man full of the stern spirit of solitude, and the thoughts God speaks to the soul that can dare to be alone," and he was not afraid. He was no sleek and effeminate priest, no time-serving scribe, no courtier from the king's palace clad in soft raiment. He was a man for the hour and the work demanded, brave, disciplined, quick-witted, self-reliant, rugged, and strong—a great man raised up to meet and turn to the world's account a great emergency. Men had but to look upon him to be condemned for their sins and strengthened in the right, while at the first sound of his voice they knew that they had found a leader and a teacher. Free from all conventionalities and dogmas, from all ritualism and priestly superstition, free as the eagles that soar above his head, he comes to offer the kingdom of heaven to his countrymen; to offer righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost (Rom. xiv, 17) to the wounded and crushed and disappointed, and to establish a Church into which all can come, a Church as wide and free as the bosom of his own native hill-country.

His preaching "was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power." 1 Cor. ii, 4. No man could dictate what he should preach. He took his orders day by day from the Holy Spirit. Like his Master, he was no

respector of persons. He recognized no class distinctions. He hated all egotism and selfishness and aristocracy. One man's soul was as precious to him as another's. He came to herald a world's Redeemer, and men soon found that his new Gospel was as free as the winds that swept along the crags of Engedi or rustled the oak leaves of his own loved Hebron.

John differed greatly from the other teachers of the desert. They were constantly narrowing in their ideas and instructions, more and more influenced by the exclusiveness of the life they led, while he was as constantly widening. He became daily more practical, and his steady tendency was toward a larger field of action. They only imparted their modicum of truth to such as carefully sought them out, attracted by their reputation for sanctity, while he was constrained to go forth and reprove his countrymen for their hypocrisy and sin, to warn them against the just condemnation of heaven, exhort them to abandon their evil ways, no longer trust in forms and ceremonies, and by repentance and faith join themselves to the eternal kingdom of heaven. John was more than a reformer. He was the bearer of a message from the merciful King of Israel to his rebellious subjects; a message which formulated Jehovah's last attempt to restore the true spirit and authority of the theocracy.

John's contemporaries would not be likely to recognize the authority of a teacher who had not attained the age at which the scribes were accustomed to enter

upon their public work as instructors, and the Levites to take up their appointed service in the temple (Num. iv, 3); so he remained in retirement until he was about thirty years old, and then, when the hour for action came, God's welcome and long-expected call found him ready for the brief but brilliant career which awaited him. Those thirty years had wrought great and important changes in the affairs of the Jewish people. To quote the excellent *résumé* of Dr. William Hanna :

“At their beginning those intestine wars which previously had somewhat weakened the Roman power had closed in the peaceful establishment of the empire under Augustus Cæsar. The dangers to Jewish liberty grew all the greater and the impatience of the people under the Roman yoke became the more intense; the extreme patriot party, who were in favor with the people generally, became frantic in their zeal. After the death of Herod the Great, while yet it remained uncertain whether Augustus would recognize the accession of Archelaus to the throne, an insurrection broke out in Jerusalem, which was only quelled by the slaughter of three thousand of the insurgents, and by the ill-omened stoppage of the great Passover festival. Augustus, unwilling to lay any heavier yoke on those who were already fretting beneath the one they bore, confirmed the will of Herod by which he divided his kingdom among his sons, suffered the Jews still to have nominally a government of their own, and

recognized Archelaus as king over Judea and Samaria. His reign was a short and troubled one, and at its close Judea and Samaria were attached to Syria, made part of a Roman province, and had procurators, or governors, from Rome set over them, of whom the sixth in order was Pontius Pilate, who entered upon his office about the very time when the Baptist began his ministry. The lingering shadows of royalty and independence were thus removed. Not content with removing them, the usurper intermeddled with the ecclesiastical as well as the civil government of Judea. In the Mosaic institute the high-priest, the most important public functionary of the Jews, attained his office hereditarily, and held it for life.

“The emperor now claimed and exercised the right of investiture, and appointed and deposed as he pleased. During the period between the death of Herod and the destruction of Jerusalem we read of twenty-eight high-priests holding the office in succession, only one of whom retained it till his death. This dependence on Rome, not only for the appointment but for continuance in it, necessarily generated great servility on the part of aspirants to the office, and great abuses in the manner in which its duties were discharged. A supple, sagacious, venal man like Annas, though not able to establish himself permanently in the chair, was able to secure it in turn for five of his sons, for his son-in-law Caiaphas, with whom he was associated at the time of the crucifixion,

and afterward for his grandson. Such a state of things among the governing authorities fomented the popular animosity to the foreign rule. The whole country was in a ferment. Popular outbreaks were constantly occurring. The public mind was in such an inflammable condition that any adventurer daring enough and strong enough to raise the standard of revolt was followed by multitudes. Among these insurrectionary chiefs, some of whom were of the lowest condition and the most worthless character, Judas of Galilee distinguished himself by his open proclamation of the principle that it was not lawful to pay tribute to Cæsar, and his political creed was adopted by thousands who had not the courage, as he had, to pay the penalty of their lives in acting it out. It can easily be imagined what a fresh hold their faith and hopes as to the foretold Messiah would take upon the hearts of a people thus galled and fretted to the uttermost by political discontent. The higher views of his character would naturally be swallowed up and lost in the conception of him as the great Deliverer who was to break those hated bonds which bound them, restore the old theocracy, and make Jerusalem, not Rome, the seat and center of a universal monarchy." \*

In the fifteenth year of the associate reign of the Emperor Tiberius, A. U. C. 780, probably between August, A. D. 28, and August, A. D. 29, "Pontius

\* *Life of Our Lord*, vol. i, pp. 136-139.



Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and of the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias the tetrarch of Abilene, Annas and Caiaphas being the high-priests, the word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins; as it is written in the book of the words of Esaias the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God."\* Luke iii, 1-6.

In the above statement "Luke exhibits the true historical spirit. Christianity is a religion of *facts*. It stands in its place in history. It is neither theory, nor legend, nor myth. Here are its dates, and during the rule of these princes, and in the localities here designated, the commencing events of our religion transpired in open historic day. The challenge is thus boldly given to learned criticism to invalidate the record. Learned criticism has tried its best, and it has totally and signally failed. Luke's chronology is triumphant over every assault, and is in every

\* Lange on Luke iii, 1. Jarvis's *Chronologic Introduction*, p. 228. sq., 462, sq.

point true. Tiberius Cæsar was the cruel and sensual successor of Augustus in the empire of Rome. Reckoning the fifteen years from the death of Augustus, when Jesus was seventeen years of age, Jesus would now be thirty-two years of age. But as in fact he was but about thirty, it is beyond doubt that Luke reckons in these fifteen years the two years in which Tiberius reigned in connection with Augustus. Pilate was at this time procurator of Judea; an office rather of a pecuniary nature, yet, in the irregularities of the times, extended over every department of government. He was the sixth governor of Palestine after the cessation of royalty. He was noted for his severity, cruelty, and despotic will. On one occasion, contrary to the practice of the Roman governors, who respected as far as possible the religious peculiarities of subject provinces, he introduced the Roman standards into the city with the images of the emperor upon them, esteemed idolatrous by the Jews. When the Jews remonstrated he threatened to massacre them. Upon this they threw themselves upon the ground, unanimously protesting that they would rather die than consent to the profanation; upon which the Roman governor relented. On another occasion, when the Jews seditiously opposed his expending the sacred money upon the city water-works, he sent a body of soldiers with concealed arms to fall upon them unawares, who committed a much greater massacre than he intended. St. Luke refers

to a massacre by him, committed at a passover, when he mingled the blood of certain Galileans with the sacrifices they were performing. A similar cruelty in the massacre of certain Samaritans, after they had submitted, proved the ruin of Pilate. The Samaritan senate sent a complaint of his cruelty to Vitellius, president of Syria, by whom Pilate was ordered to Rome, to answer to the charge before the Emperor Tiberius. Before he arrived Tiberius died; but Pilate was banished by his successor, Caligula, to Vienne in Gaul, where, in mortification for his disgrace, he committed suicide." \*

At this period Caiaphas and Annas divided the functions of the high-priest, and disgraced the office they usurped. The balance of power rested in the hands of unprincipled Herodians, except when at times, for a brief interval, the Sadducees, made hard and tyrannical by their peculiar religious tenets, gained control. It was a sad day for the nation. Public oppression, private debauchery, and desecration of the name and spirit of religion prevailed throughout the land. It was in such a state of things that John at last came forth from his retreat, as a prophet to his nation. A general discontent and a general expectancy of some great event which would change the current of affairs, together with John's unique history and appearance, prepared the people to listen to his words. Since the wilderness of

\* Whedon on Luke iii, 1; Matt. xxvii, 2.

Judea was near to Jerusalem, and John belonged to a well-known family, and since the people were accustomed to seek out hermits of especial reputation for sanctity, no doubt many had visited him in his retreat, from time to time, to question him and to receive his counsels. The wilderness was in one sense sacred to the Jews, as connected with some of the most important events of their national history. The ancient rabbis say that "from the wilderness came the law, the tabernacle, the Sanhedrin, the priesthood, and the office of the Levites. Even the kingship, and, indeed, every good gift which God granted Israel, came from the desert." \* The present invitation to the people by this new teacher reminded them of the words of Isaiah: "Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God." Isa. xl, 3. In connection with the expectation of the Messiah the influence of the wilderness was immense. Josephus tells us that, by virtue of its weight with the people, Theudas, a wild visionary who claimed to be a prophet, some years after the crucifixion persuaded the multitudes to follow him to the river Jordan, which, like Elijah, he could divide by his own command, and into the wilderness, where he promised to perform other miracles, and in God's name to deliver the people from their oppressors. At frequent intervals other impostors and deceivers enticed the multitudes to follow them into

\* Quoted by Sepp, *Leben Jesu*, ii, 44.

the wilderness, but, usually, the Roman authorities, fearing a revolt, dispersed them, and punished with death the chief participants.\* Before Jesus himself left his disciples he deemed it necessary to warn them not to go out into the wilderness at any time when it was said that the Christ was there. Matt. xxiv, 26. During all these troublous times the Jews were expecting the advent of "a wise and perfect prophet," who should bring back the lost Urim and Thummim, restore the tribes of Israel, "turn the heart of the fathers to the children," reprove the times, and appease the wrath of God, before it broke out in fury. Mal. iv, 5, 6.

From the days of the faithful Ezra the feeling among the most righteous had grown deeper and deeper that nothing but sincere repentance could save the nation from destruction. The rabbis said: "If we repent but one day the Messiah would appear." Men were taught that the Messiah was to lead them back to God by repentance. "As long as Israel does not repent it cannot expect the Saviour," said Rabbi Juda.† But it was said this repentance would not happen till Elijah had come, in fulfillment of the prediction of Malachi, and he was not to do so till three days before the appearance of the Messiah, when his voice would proclaim from one end of the earth to the other, "Salvation cometh into the

\* Josephus, *Ant.*, xx, 5, 1; 8, 6.

† The rabbis quoted by Nork, *Rabbinische Quellen*, pp. 15, 16.



world.”\* The expectation was gradually increasing to culmination.

Thus it is evident that the people were not altogether unprepared for John's public appearance. Still he burst upon the astonished vision of the multitude like the flash of a meteor, with his brief and startling exhortation, which even rose to the compelling power of a divine command: “Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!”

When the wondering people heard his voice and his message, when they looked upon his vigorous form and felt the spell of his commanding appearance and manner, there was no room in their minds for doubt that a great prophet had risen up among them.

He spoke with all the authority of an ancient seer. The most learned in the sacred books were quick to admit that John was no adventurer, but a veritable prophet. He quickly won the hearts of the more common people, because he gave expression to their unuttered groans, and aroused their sinking hope, and stimulated their enthusiasm, until the land was overspread by a most unusual and intense religious excitement. He came to warn, to threaten, or to encourage his countrymen, as the case might be, and he did his work so skillfully that, for the time at least, they seemed completely subject to his will. His instructions were thoroughly biblical in charac-

\* *Eisenmenger Judenthum Entdecktes*, ii, 696.

ter, but revealing somewhat those influences which had brought Oriental and Alexandrine culture into the Palestinian schools. He was aware of the various influences which were shaping the current opinions of the most thoughtful among his hearers, and we have reason to believe that he was fully prepared, in knowledge and mental discipline, for the work he had undertaken. But above all John was a prophet, and the word of the Lord had come to him in the wilderness,\* and he adopted a specific line of instruction, indicated by his opening words: "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!"

He did no miracle,† but his very appearance and words were sufficient to attract instant and prevailing attention. He may at first have crossed the track of some great caravans from the north-eastern country, as they wound their way up and through the mountain gorges on the road from Jericho to Jerusalem. From there his fame quickly spread, until crowds came forth from Jerusalem and Bethlehem and Hebron, and from every town and village of Judea, to look upon the strange man—this "true son of the desert"—and to listen to his speech. In aspect and in dress he is, indeed, like one of their old prophets. They are told that he is of the priestly order, and the strange "sayings" touching his birth and mission that thirty years ago were "noised abroad through all the hill-country" are now revived. Some of his

\* Luke iii, 2.

† John x, 41.

father's old contemporaries begin to take a deep interest in him, and are led to listen most attentively and anxiously to his preaching.

He depends entirely upon the divine power of the summons he utters for the desired impression, and he is not disappointed in the results. His countrymen have long been waiting for the kingdom of heaven; the deepest, warmest desires of their hearts are toward this kingdom, and now this strange man declares that it is at hand. No wonder they go forth in crowds to welcome its approach; no wonder they are so ready to obey the herald that its day may be hastened! There was a wondrous spell in the Baptist's preaching, and the excitement it produced has had its parallel but once or twice in the history of the race. With one consent the entire population of southern Palestine went out to throng around him and to follow him as their religious leader and teacher. He arose at once to the very pinnacle of popularity, but he was too well trained to be harmed thereby. He did not lose his head for one moment. He forgot himself in his wonderful message, and the more the people lauded him the more faithful he was to the truth and to them.

He had nothing in common with the scribes and Pharisees; still he was but repeating to the people, under the influence of a new and powerful motive, and with a clear and inspiring knowledge of their real meaning, the lessons of their ancient prophets.

He was simply removing, in his own rough but effective way, the rabbinical rubbish which had hidden the truth for centuries, and bringing it forth once more to the light of day in all its beauty and power.\*

The people who thronged the new teacher were principally Jews, and therefore of mercurial temperament, and, paradoxical as it may be, were also very tenacious of opinion and purpose. Under favorable circumstances they could be very easily aroused, and accelerated in any course already begun. They were restive under foreign rule. Their pride was deeply wounded. They were longing and looking for relief, for something in their favor. They were "children of the prophets," and the appearance, style, and teaching of John stirred up all their piety and patriotism. The whole scene reminded them of the great prophets of old. John had the further advantage of being most profoundly in earnest, most thoroughly independent, and most self-forgetfully courageous. "He listened to the voice of God in his own soul and spake right on." No wonder the people gave him a passionate reception.

The very appearance of John was sufficient to arrest attention. His spare form, made strong and agile by plain but wholesome diet, and rough exercise in the hill-country and the wilderness; his bright Jewish eyes, made fascinating by the living energy

\* Compare Isa. i, 16, 17; lv, 7; Jer. vii, 3-7; Ezek. xviii, 19-32; Joel ii, 12, 13; Micah vi, 8; Zech. i. 3, 4.

that burned within; his long black hair, uncut for thirty years; and his flowing hair-cloth robe, confined about his waist by the coarse leathern girdle, made him the very picture of the fiery prophet the people were taught by their sacred books to expect. The Scriptures described Elijah the Tishbite, whom all expected to re-appear before the Messiah, in exactly such a guise as John presented—as a long-haired man, “and girt with a girdle of leather about his loins” (2 Kings i, 8)—and they knew, from the descriptions they had often heard read in the synagogue, that the rough hair-cloth mantle had been the common dress of the old prophets as a class. Rev. xi, 3; Isa. xx, 2; Zech. xiii, 4. It had always been, among the Jews, the common symbol of grief and contrition, and therefore was at once a strong appeal to their sense of guilt and of the necessity of godly sorrow. 2 Kings vi, 30; Job xvi, 15; 1 Kings xxi, 27.

Of John the Baptist in art it may be summarily said that in all early devotional effigies and paintings his personal appearance varies little. Following the notions prevalent in the Church, rather than facts and the brief record in the case, he is represented as a tall, meager figure, sunburnt and haggard, as one wasted with vigils and fasting, and with the desert life; his hair and beard disheveled. In the Greek pictures he is seen with black elf locks that literally stand on end, and covered only with a garment of camel's hair bound with a leathern girdle,



the limbs and chest exposed, while the hand is uplifted to warn and testify. Such is the most ancient, and perhaps the most frequent, representation. But in the more modern schools of art the sense of beauty was too strong to be sacrificed to the fitness and the truth of things, and, passing to the other extreme, John is often represented as a beautiful youth, with the form of a young Apollo or a man in the prime of life, dignified and benign, and often—particularly when standing as Patron and Prophet by the throne of the Virgin—he wears over his scanty camel's-hair shirt a mantle of red or green flowing to the ground in rich, ample folds.

## CHAPTER X.

## THE SPIRIT AND POWER OF ELIAS.

IN closing up the canon of the Jewish Scriptures, God, through the pen of his prophet Malachi, declares: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse." Mal. iv, 5, 6.

For nearly four hundred years before John's birth the people had regarded these words as the very last oracles given with prophetic authority; and, with various conceptions of their meaning, were anxiously looking for their fulfillment. These prophetic utterances were as grossly misconceived by the great body of the people as were those relating to the coming and kingdom of the Messiah. Their spiritual eyesight was too dull to catch the real import of the sacred words, and they seemed to expect that either the Tishbite himself would return in his chariot of flame from the heavenly paradise into which he had been caught, or that by some strange metempsychosis, hitherto unknown, his spirit was to be re-embodied in

the form of some wise Pharisee who would lead the nation to its golden age, or some mighty warrior who at the head of an invincible host would exalt the national religion and government to their rightful supremacy in the earth.

This interpretation of the prophecy has been universally held by the Jews, and the tenacity, not to say obstinacy, with which they have clung to this opinion has been a great hinderance to their receiving Jesus as the Christ.

Dean Stanley says of Elijah: "He stood alone against Jezebel. He stands alone in many senses among the prophets. Nursed in the bosom of Israel, the prophetic portion, if one may so say, of the chosen people, vindicating the true religion from the nearest danger of overthrow, setting at defiance by invisible power the whole forces of the Israelite kingdom, he reached a height equal to that of Moses and Samuel in the traditions of his country. He was the prophet for whose return in later years his countrymen have looked with most eager hope. The last prophet of the old dispensation clung to this consolation in the decline of the state. In the gospel history we find this expectation constantly excited in each successive appearance of a new prophet. It was a fixed belief of the Jews that he had appeared again and again, as an Arabian merchant, to wise and good rabbis at their prayers or on a journey. A seat is still placed for him to superintend the circumcision

of Jewish children. Passover after passover the Jews of our own day place the paschal cup on the table and set the door wide open, believing that this is the moment when Elijah will re-appear. When goods are found and no owner comes, when difficulties arise and no solution appears, the answer is, 'Put them by till Elijah comes.' " \*

The prophets were, in a peculiar sense, Jehovah's watchmen over Israel. They were a sort of personified conscience to the people. They represented divine truth and holiness. They kept a jealous eye upon the manners and tendencies of the times, and without fear or favor brought the divine authority to bear wherever they detected any tendency to depart from the spirit of real godliness. Such, pre-eminently, was Elijah, a man of heroic energy of action, whose career, romantic and even marvelous in its character, aroused a peculiar interest among the people, and was the foundation of many a tale and legend handed down among the traditions of the nation. Elijah's actual words were few, but "they were spoken as from the secret place of thunder, and seemed more like decrees issued from the presence of the Eternal than the utterances of one of like passions with those he addressed."

He came at a time when the most flagrant enormities were openly practiced in the high places of the land, a time when God's law was forgotten or

\* *History of the Jewish Church*, Part II, p. 290.

ignored; and in his fearless, direct, and terrible attacks upon those in authority he seemed the very avenging angel of the Most High. So in John's day there was, especially among all devout Jews, a revival of this old expectation that Elijah would come at this crisis in the nation's affairs, in this time of Israel's sorest need, and right all wrongs by peremptorily summoning the people back to righteousness, and leading them on to the utter overthrow of their oppressors, whether in palace or temple. So fixed was this expectation that the simple-hearted disciples, Peter, James, and John, did not seem surprised when, at the transfiguration of our Lord, Elijah appeared with Moses to hold high converse, upon the most momentous themes, with the divine Redeemer. Matt. xvii, 1-13. Their surprise was, rather, that Elijah had again disappeared; for they thought that his place in the Messiah's earthly kingdom would be a permanent one, in harmony with the teachings of the scribes. In their perplexity they turned with questioning words to Jesus, feeling that he alone could explain the seeming discrepancy between his own statements and the actual facts, on the one hand, and the instructions of their national teachers on the other. "And his disciples asked him, saying, Why then say the scribes that Elias [Elijah, called in the Septuagint version Elias] must first come?" Their question led our Lord to refer to the prophesy of Malachi, and to place himself at the time of its



utterance, when the coming of Elijah, as John, was yet future. He therefore used the future in speaking of John's agency. "And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things. But I say unto you, That Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them. Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist." They were no longer to look for Elias as future; neither were they to look upon this transient vision of Elias as the fulfillment of Malachi's prediction. And yet he said, "Elias is come already," meaning (and so the disciples understood him) that Jehovah had, by the pen of Malachi, simply designated John by the name of the prophet of whom he was the antitype: just as Christ is called our *Passover* by the appropriation to him of the name which belonged to his type. Our Lord some time previous to the transfiguration had made a similar important declaration on the Elijah of Malachi, when, explaining to the multitude the true character of John the Baptist, he said: "This is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. . . . And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come." Matt. xi, 10, 14.

Our Lord thus emphatically declares that John fulfilled both prophecies, in Malachi, and that he was

his forerunner. But it is evident from what follows that he did not expect the nation at large to believe it. He knew too well the pride and obstinacy of the national heart, which had departed so very far from the true faith of the fathers and the prophets. When the deputation from the Sanhedrin waited upon John, to question him as to his character and work, he did not deny that he was the true Elijah of Malachi. On the contrary, he affirmed it when he said: "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord." John i, 19-23; Isa. xl, 3. He first denied that he was Elias *in their sense*, answering to the perverted and unwarranted expectation of the nation; but he immediately declared that he was Elias in the true sense of Malachi's prediction.

The words of Gabriel, in announcing the birth of John to Zacharias, throw a bright light upon the entire reference. "He shall go before him in the *spirit* and *power* of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." Luke i, 17; Mal. iv, 5, 6. Here there is a blending of the early and latter portions of Malachi's oracle with a reference to Isa. xl, 3, the whole revealing to us the true spirit of our Lord's own words, as well as those of John himself. He was not Elijah in the very person of the Tishbite, as expected through Jewish tradition; but he was Elijah in the *spirit* and

*power* of that prophet. For full proof of this we have only to review the work done by both Elijah and John, and to consider the spirit with which that work was accomplished.

The points of resemblance between Elijah and John are numerous and striking. Elijah was described "as a hairy man, and girt with a girdle of leather about his loins." 2 Kings i, 8. His abode was often, and for years at a time, in the wilderness of the desert or the solitude of a mountain peak or the friendly clefts of the rocks. He seemed to be familiar with the secrets of nature, and to wield her forces with terrible promptness and certainty in asserting his own authority and vindicating the honor of Jehovah. His physical vigor was marvelous, and in duration of action he is unsurpassed. He came and went in a mysterious manner; never found when sought for by the royal emissaries who would take his life, and without warning appearing before the court to overawe its power, defy its authority, and carry away the people by the strength of an irresistible fascination. In dramatic effect he has no equal among the characters of Scripture. The most wonderful part of his earthly life was its end. Caught up in a fiery whirlwind, he disappeared from the earth, to be seen no more until the glorious day of the transfiguration, when, with characteristic suddenness, he appeared in solemn council with Moses and Christ.

John's home was in the wilderness. His raiment

was a long robe of camel's-hair cloth fastened around the waist with a leathern girdle. His manners were abrupt and unconventional when ministering to the multitude or confronted with all the majesty of the Sanhedrin, or even when treading the sumptuous halls of the tetrarch's palace. A Nazarite from his birth, he led a life of simple abstemiousness, kept his body in subjection by harsh means, and persistently mortified the flesh by crushing many of his most natural instincts. Through the severest discipline he "waxed strong in spirit," and at last delivered his message with a mighty eloquence before unknown to the people, and which captivated all hearts. He undoubtedly surpassed his great prototype both in mental power and in the importance of his special mission; but in strong individualism, boldness in attacking the bad morals of their times, and reproving the selfish conduct of men, as well as in the astonishing success of their efforts, Elijah and John were strikingly alike. The public career of each was in a time of great unbelief and flagrant apostasy from the law; alike they sought, in all possible earnestness and self-abnegation, to win back the people to the faith and practice of their fathers. The ministry of each was followed by great and terrible judgments.

"In the spirit and power of Elias!" These words are a striking epitome of John's career: a fearless, conscientious, vehement, authoritative, obedient, unconquerable "spirit;" an overmastering, burning

impulse toward all that was honest and good ; a completeness of endowment which made him the most brilliant of his class and the greatest of men.

A "power" which, going forth single-handed and alone as he did, made John the very personification of divine authority : a power which rendered him irresistible in action and victor in every battle ; the power of right and truth ; a power which startled and awed a whole nation, which in Elijah controlled the elements and in John led the hearts of men captive at his will ; a power which compelled Israel to cry out, at Mount Carmel, "The Lord he is God ! the Lord he is God !" and the vast multitudes of Judea to be "baptized" in Jordan, "confessing their sins ;" a power which made Herod tremble before John as Ahab trembled before Elijah, and the scribes and Pharisees, as well as the priests of Baal, to acknowledge the authority of the prophet of the living God. In Elijah this power wrought miracles, while in John it showed forth its grander use in revealing to the consciousness of the people God himself. Neither John nor Elijah wrote a single page in the book of God, but each left an impress upon the heart of the Church, and an impulse in the life of the Church, the glorious results of which will be clearly felt and seen to the very end of time. Elijah and John shall forever stand together as the highest illustration among men of moral fortitude and faithfulness.



It is thus easy to see why John in prophecy, which usually does not deal in names and always throws a thin veil of obscurity over its subjects, should be called *Elijah*, just as Jesus himself was called *David*, because he was the son and successor of that great chieftain and ruler. Hosea iii, 5; Ezek. xxxiv, 23; xxxvii, 24; Jer. xxx, 9.

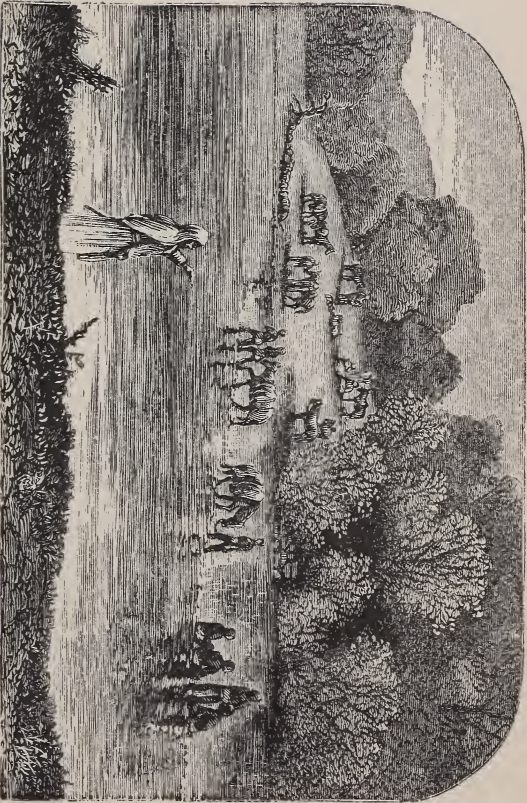
## CHAPTER XI.

THE JORDAN VALLEY AND THE BEGINNING OF THE  
GOSPEL.

JOHN made his first public appearance on the lower Jordan, near the beautiful and populous cities of the plain of Jericho. It was a spot peculiarly adapted to his purpose. Jericho, "the city of palms and roses," had been lately rebuilt by Herod the Great, and adorned with his favorite and most costly palace. It was also a sacerdotal city; that is, a city set apart for the residence of the priests, twelve thousand of whom are said to have dwelt there in Christ's day, in their turn going up to Jerusalem to take part in the services of the temple.\* A broad road connected the plain with Jerusalem, and, since the fords of the Jordan opposite Jericho afforded the only safe crossing to Moab and the rich north-eastern country, this was, of necessity, a much-frequented route for all classes of travelers. At certain seasons of the year it was fairly thronged by caravans of merchandise and by horsemen and pedestrians from Galilee going up to the feasts at Jerusalem, who had crossed the Jordan at the foot of Lake Gennesaret, and, passing down

\* Luke x, 30-37; *Whedon on Luke*, p. 113.

Ford of the Jordan.





upon the eastern side, recrossed the river at the fords, and thence to the Holy City, thus avoiding Samaria, which was a polluted land to a strict Jew.

The plain of Jericho, from the point where the mountains which hem in the Jordan on the north begin to separate to the Dead Sea, is traversed its entire length by a deep gulch cut in the loose soil and sunk like a huge canal below the surface, with a succession of two or three terrace-like banks marking the lower and higher levels in November and April. In the bottom of this gulch rolls the turbid Jordan, with a quick current, toward the Dead Sea, which is close at hand. The immediate banks of the stream are constantly changing, on account of the loose nature of the soil through which it cuts its way. Near Jericho the river has a breadth of from ninety to one hundred feet, and a varying depth of from three to seven feet, and, except in the time of the spring and autumn floods, can be easily forded by both man and beast. The upper terrace is lined with oaks and sycamores, interspersed with thickets of red tamarisks, acacias, willows, and oleanders, while the immediate edge of the stream is luxuriant with low shrubs and tall, waving reeds. West of the river, and from fifty to sixty feet above its level, the plain of Jericho stretches away a distance of three or four hours \* to the foot of the wild and rugged hills of Judea, which rise from one thousand to twelve hundred feet, and up through the

\* An hour's journey, in Syria, is reckoned as three miles.



ravines and along the terraces of which runs the road to Jerusalem. East of the river the plain soon touches the foot of the Perea range of mountains, towering from two thousand to five thousand feet above it.

In John's day the plain, particularly about Jericho, was called "the divine land," because of the greenness of its vegetation and the fairy-like beauty of the palm-groves and gardens with which Herod had adorned it, and which, by a costly system of irrigation, maintained their luxuriance the entire year.\*

Here in this region, so well suited to his purposes, John began his ministrations. † He represented to the people that with which they were, theoretically, at least, familiar; namely, righteousness according to the law. He represents also, as says Dr. Philip Schaff, "the prophetic or evangelical element of the Old Testament religion by pointing to 'the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.' He united the spirit of Moses and that of Isaiah, and stood nearest to Christ, who was the end of the law and the promise. Hence he is called the greatest among those that are born of women, and yet, as still belonging to the preparatory dispensation of the Old Testament, less than the least in the kingdom of heaven. The comparison is not one of personal merit, but of stand-point and official position."

\* Josephus, *Ant.*, xvii, 13, 1.

† For a more complete description of the Jordan valley, Dead Sea, etc., see *Ruth the Moabitess. the Ancestress of Our Lord*, pp. 94-104.

Taking into account the whole development of the Gospel John's work was its logical beginning. Mark so treats it in the opening of his first chapter; and throughout the apostolic age evangelical tradition and evangelical preaching always referred to the appearance of the Baptist as their true starting-point. Dr. J. P. Lange says: "The Baptist is the representative and final expression of the whole Old Testament. But the Old Testament itself, terminating in him, becomes one great forerunner, and the voice of the Spirit of God in the wilderness, which proclaims the manifestation of Christ; that is, it becomes a compendious introduction to the original New Testament, springing from heaven."\*

"There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world." John i, 6-9.

Here then is the Light and its witness. The entire Old Testament was the historical witness to this Light. John, however, the last of the prophets, was the only one of the line who was a personal witness to the living and personal Light. In the Baptist we have concentrated, in personal form, all previous prophetic utterances concerning Christ. As "the voice" he was the final recapitulation of all voices in all the

\* Comment on Mark, chap. i.

ages which had proclaimed a coming Messiah. In the gradual unfolding of the genealogical life of Christ we have what has well been called the hidden side of the Old Testament; while in the clear prophetic testimony concerning his advent we have the visible side. The verbal prophecy necessarily anticipated the real prophecy, and so the fulfillment of the verbal prophecy in John preceded the fulfillment of the real prophecy in Christ. Therefore John is here set in the right place by the evangelist. He is the glowing radiance of the dawn, witnessing and heralding the advent of the Sun of Righteousness sweeping up the sky with healing in his wings.\*

Having effectually guarded us against confounding John with Christ, the evangelist proceeds to give a sketch of the incarnate Logos as entering, operating, and dwelling in our living world. In opposition to every false light he is the only true Light, "*which, coming into the world, enlighteneth every man,*"† so that he need not, of necessity, be environed with a darkness which cannot be penetrated by the light. The full warrant for this statement is found in the fact that from the Logos a strong moral consciousness has been implanted in the original nature of every man; and when, in certain ages and conditions, sin has darkened or dulled that consciousness, the Logos

\* Mal. iv, 2, and Professor Packard's comment in Lange on Malachi.

† See rendering of the best commentators.

—the Christ—has shed his beams of truth and love upon it, quickening its life and strengthening its authority. This has been often unappreciated and indeed unwelcome; but, like the blessed rain from heaven, it has graciously fallen upon the just and the unjust in all ages, but especially, and most benignly, during the incarnation.

“John, the Baptist,” says the author of *Ecce Homo*, “was like the Emperor Nerva. In his career it was given him to do two things—to inaugurate a new *régime*, and also to nominate a successor who was far greater than himself. And by this successor his work was taken up, developed, completed, and made permanent; so that, however John may have seemed to his own generation to have lived in vain, and those scenes on the banks of the Jordan to have been the delusive promise of a future that was never to be, at the distance of near two thousand years he appears not less, but far greater, than he appeared to his contemporaries, and all that his baptism promised to do appears utterly insignificant compared with what it has actually done.”

## CHAPTER XII.

## JOHN PREACHES REPENTANCE.

THERE was great variety in the congregation which gathered around the eloquent young preacher. He no doubt recognized in the crowd many with whom he had associated in early life, as well as many aged and influential men whom he had been taught to revere because of their learning, piety, and high position. The rich and the poor were there, and every occupation and profession in Jewish life was represented. But John made no distinctions among them. In the stern tones of authority he addressed them all with the exhortation: "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

"It has sometimes been said that the repentance inculcated by John was merely that of the Old, not that of the New, Testament. But, even granting this, we must remember that John cherished the spiritual views of repentance propounded by the prophets, and not the common legal notions of the Jews, and that he represented the Old Testament in its point of transition to the New. The Baptist evidently regarded repentance as a change of mind. He was aware of the difference between mere outward and real repentance—between transient feel-



ings and that deep change which manifests itself by corresponding fruits of righteousness. His idea of repentance exceeded the outward requirements of the Mosaic law. In his view repentance implied an entire renunciation of the world—dying to the old and consecration to a new life. Besides, it is important to bear in mind that the Baptist seems to have already, in some measure, realized the rejection of the unworthy portion of the race of Abraham and the calling of the Gentiles. But the great point of distinction lies in this: that the repentance which he enforced must have sprung from faith in the predictions regarding the coming Messiah.” \*

It was a most humbling doctrine that John preached to his countrymen—a doctrine which assumed that they, as representatives of the nation, were wicked, ignorant, and in spiritual darkness. But it was also a compassionate doctrine; for it gave hope to the despairing, stretched out a helping hand to the fallen, and flashed a supernatural light athwart the eyes of the spiritually blind. It was a doctrine well calculated to prepare the way of the Lord, and to make his paths straight; to fill up the valleys and level down the hills, and to make the rough way smooth, that the conquering King might come in all his glory and power, and all flesh be fitted to see the salvation of God. Isa. xl, 3-5.

\* Dr. J. P. Lange on Matt. iii.

The great argument by which the preacher recommended and enforced his salutary doctrine was this: "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." A long time had elapsed since the nation had been taught by any direct divine manifestation; but soon the nation's true King would appear in a personal reign of wisdom and grace. There would be a new display of divine perfection, for God himself would dwell among men, in human form, to teach them how to follow the law and the prophets by being loyal subjects in the new dispensation for which the Old Testament was the preparation. True men, regenerate men, were now to be made to sit together "in heavenly places in Christ." One thing John certainly made plain to every listening Jew; namely, that theocratic descent and the observance of outward forms and ceremonies would not secure admittance into the Messiah's kingdom; would give no claim to the Messiah's mercy or consideration. Jehovah would sift his people, and only those who repented of sin and error, and brought forth fruits which proved the genuineness of their profession, could hope to be reconciled with him. Luke iii, 8, 9. Repentance involved reconciliation with God, as well as sorrow for sin. A new and supernatural life must be bestowed upon the true penitent. This change John knew that he could not effect, but he did not fail to point the inquiring heart to the coming Christ as able to save to the uttermost.

John's call to repentance was not essentially differ-

ent from that which had been sounded in the ears of Israel by every prophet of God. From Moses to Malachi their divine commission had been to exhort and command the nation to repent of sin, as a preparation for God's mercy and a refuge from impending calamity. And now the very last of the prophets, his heart stirred to its profoundest depths with love and anxiety for his race, and his soul lifted above all fear of possible danger to himself, boldly denounces the sins of Israel, and faithfully points out the wrath of God to come if this one last chance for reformation, and consequent restoration to divine favor, is ignored.

In harmony with every prophet who had gone before him, the Baptist declared that God had no pleasure in the death of a wicked man or a wicked nation, but that his one purpose was to persuade them to turn from evil and to live. It was not the destruction of the tree that the divine husbandman sought, but its thorough purification and its abundant fruitfulness. His delight was not in burning the chaff, but in safely garnering the wheat. Luke iii, 9, 17. Repent, and turn unto the Lord, was the gracious command, and the kingdom of heaven—an eternal reign of perfect truth and love—was the more gracious promise. There was nothing particularly winning in the call to repentance—it was too terrible in its reproofs and denunciations for that—but the proclamation that the long-prayed-for kingdom of heaven was already at the door,

and that every man must make haste to be ready for it, met the deepest and most sacred wishes of the national heart.

John did not conceal from his hearers the fact that the coming kingdom would severely test and expose all who were morally unfit to accept its King. He clearly intimated that it was not to be a Jewish kingdom, or a Roman kingdom, but a kingdom above all national hopes and ambitions, a universal kingdom of justice and grace. Every character would be tried as by fire, and the learned rabbi as well as the Roman ruler, the proud Pharisee as well as the despised publican and outcast sinner, must enter the kingdom, if he enter at all, through the narrow door of penitence, and be exalted to full citizenship solely by the grace which operates through self-forgetful, obedient faith.

No doubt, when John spoke of the wrath to come, he voiced a fear, which was almost universal in the hearts of men, that some terrible judgment was about to be visited upon a wicked world. All thoughtful men were anxious about the future, and the Jews, especially, readily grasped the teaching that a moral and spiritual change was the sinner's sole defense against the force of divine wrath. The Hebrew conscience seemed to be suddenly aroused, as by some supernatural enlightenment, to enforce the prophet's call. From the Pharisee whose noble lineage, profound learning, and exact observance of the law fitted

him to be a ruler and leader of the people, down to the man or woman so hopelessly unclean that the temple and the ritual furnished no place for repentance, all heard the fearless call, the imperative command, and hanging, as if for life or death, upon the prophet's words, submitted to his authority that they might share his hope of mercy and blessing to come. So pressing is the need, and so quick is the response to John's message, that Jerusalem herself—the holy city, the habitation of Jehovah, the very type of purity and sanctity—goes out into the wilderness as a penitent, to humbly confess her sins and thus put herself in the way of pardon. Heb. xiii, 13–21.

If John had counseled with the learned leaders of the nation, they would have recognized, no doubt, the need of divine mercy; but, like many of modern times, they would have urged him to respect the prejudices and the customs and the social conditions of men, particularly the influential; they would have recommended a soft gospel, that spoke not of judgment, but persuaded without giving offense. But John was too wise and too honest for that. The Holy Spirit revealed to him, in a measure, the hearts of men. He saw their corruption and their struggles for purity; he heard their sighs and groans. The remedy he offered was sharp and grievous to the soul, but it was the only remedy that could reach the disease. The case was urgent; it called



for heroic treatment, and the physician was skillful enough and brave enough to give it. He seemed harsh and unsympathetic, but he was really compassionate and kind. He knew that the rankling thorn must be entirely withdrawn from the festering flesh before the healing virtue of the "precious ointment" could avail. Many of the people before him were proud; they hated to repent, they hated to denounce their own past lives, they did not want the world to know their real characters. But without repentance and confession, at least to God, there was no honesty; and without honesty there was no mercy and pardon. There is no help for the prodigal while he eats and sleeps among swine. He must arise and hasten, by the shortest road, back to the father, with honest penitence in his heart, and honest confession upon his lips. By so doing he shall enter into forgiveness, home, and the kingdom of heaven. The restless soul cannot be pillowed upon a lie, however soft and beautiful it may be made to appear; but the truth can bring peace and rest to the weary one, though it be hard and rough as Jacob's bed at Bethel. Gen. xxviii, 10-22. So, from the very tenderness and love of his strong heart, John offered men only the rugged truth when he said, "You want rest; repent, therefore, and prove your sincerity by your deeds, and you shall find rest unto your souls. This is the only way; walk ye in it!"

There is something, in all human nature not

utterly debased, that compels a man to respect faithful dealing; so it is no wonder the people thronged this new teacher. Men may applaud the silver-tongued time-server, who utters soft and beautiful things, and, deluded for the moment, may spurn a plain and pointed but full gospel; nevertheless, in the day of realities, the day when all principles and characters are tried as by fire, they will forsake the one and cling with the resistless grasp of a last hope to the other. The voice of conscience can never be completely hushed; and when God's preacher is bold enough and great enough to break through all barriers of custom and corrupt tastes, to rise above all self-seeking and all desire for human applause or fear of human censure, and plainly tell every man that he is a sinner, and must repent or he can never, by any possible chance or favor, be saved, there is that within the human soul which cries out in response, "It is the truth. I *know* it is the truth!" Say what you will, men need, and long for, honest, fearless, plain speech in all matters which relate to salvation and eternity.

x Men came to John's baptism enveloped in the clouds and darkness of God's wrath, but they went away rejoicing in the dawning sunlight of his countenance. "Repent! repent!" cried the preacher; but he quickly added, "for the kingdom of heaven is at hand;" thus throwing wide open the door of endless life to all true believers, and preparing them

for the words of the great Teacher himself, who said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit"—those self-conscious sinners, who are morally bankrupt and are willing to confess it, who have a receptive vacancy for the Gospel, and look to nothing else to make them rich—"for theirs is the kingdom of heaven!"

Never was a great doctrine more vividly revealed in the character and acts of a great man than was this vital doctrine of repentance in John himself. In appearance, in speech, in concentration of all effort, in self-forgetful earnestness, and even in the choice of a place in which to deliver his message, he was a worthy exponent of his startling theme. In him the great doctrine of repentance became a living, tangible force among men, just as love was seen in Christ, and justification by faith found its highest illustration in Paul. Repentance was seen coming and going in a prophet's mantle, consorting with men, entering their homes, and controlling their hearts.

Renan most justly says :

"In morality, as in art, words are nothing, deeds are every thing. The idea which is concealed beneath a picture of Raphael is a small thing ; it is the picture alone that counts. Likewise, in morality, truth becomes of value only if it pass to the condition of feeling, and it attains all its preciousness only when it is realized in the world as a fact.

Men of indifferent morals have written very good maxims. Men very virtuous, also, have done nothing to continue the tradition of their virtue in the world. The palm belongs to him who has been mighty in word and in work, who has felt the truth, and, at the price of his blood, has made it triumph." \*

\* *Life of Jesus*, chap. v.

## CHAPTER XIII.

## JOHN'S CONGREGATION.

THE spot which John had chosen for the delivery of his message, in its scenery and in its historical associations, gave emphasis and momentum to his utterances. Here the men of Jerusalem breathed a purer air; and in the expanding plain, the towering mountains, the graceful palms, the fruitful vineyards, and the rippling water they were brought face to face with God. These quiet and more natural surroundings were the very conditions they needed to help them to the fulfilment of an honest purpose. They could not fail to remember that here was the first exhibition of God's just wrath against sin unrepented of, in their history as a people. Gen. xix. Here their forefathers were first led into the promised land, and taught that Jehovah would be with them there to help and protect them. Josh. iii, 6. Here Elijah—who some of them thought had now come again—ended his unique career as the stern instrument of divine judgment against apostasy and idolatry, and the gentle renewer of the broken covenant; and here he was caught up toward heaven in the fiery storm-cloud, which was to him and to Elisha



the glowing symbol of Jehovah's power still set for the defense of his people against the aggressions of a foreign foe and the curse of a foreign faith. 1 Kings xvii; 2 Kings ii. With such a message upon his lips, and with such an environment, the great preacher did not speak in vain. Centuries had elapsed since his countrymen had been aroused and moved to such spiritual activity as that into which he now led them.

They forgot their proud self-righteousness, and confessed themselves sinners. They suddenly realized that they were the people of God in name only. The bold, clear voice of reproof from the banks of the Jordan reached every part of the land, and, re-enforced by conscience, it seemed to dominate every other influence. Even the priests and scribes ceased their senseless controversies and listened, and, as they listened, trembled. ("For one splendid moment the nation awoke to the meaning of its singular and sublime faith," rose superior to its degradation, burst the shackles of ritualism and superstition, forgot the oppression of its haughty Roman conqueror, and welcomed once more the reign and righteousness of God.)

Dr. E. E. Hale says in his peculiarly graphic manner: "All sorts of people came together here who were not accustomed to come into the wilderness, and they came from all sorts of places. They were people not much used to seeing each other, too. Real Bedouin, who were quite at ease in camp life,

came face to face with quiet people, town-bred, who were a good deal astonished to find themselves sleeping under the stars, or sitting around a fire together telling stories in the open air before bed-time came. Jerusalem Jews were not over-civil, as we know, to Gentile people; and neither of them had much fancy for the people who belonged to Edom, on the eastern side of the river; and all of them hated the soldiers through and through. But old prejudices or old likings were, in this case, swayed and overruled by the eager desire to know what Elijah had to say, if he were Elijah, and what Elijah wanted them to do so that they might be free of these grinding oppressions. Here was a camp with a leader. It all looked as if it might be used for a purpose. These people assembled as if they meant to do something." Every village and city of Judea, and Galilee, and Perea, and the land east of the Jordan was liberally represented. Pharisees and Sadducees were there in great numbers; priests and Levites, scribes and elders, and even publicans and sinners, were permitted to mingle with the expectant throng. Arabs from the desert stood side by side with rich merchants and haughty doctors of the law from the "best society" of the capital city. Warriors from the Roman and Herodian armies added to the picturesqueness of the scene as their bright arms and armor flashed in the sunlight. All came to hear the prophet; some from desire to know the truth,

from whatever source it might come; some with hearts wildly beating with "the hope of Israel," and some with no higher motive than idle curiosity; but all remained to be brought completely under the spell of the great preacher's eloquence, to confess their past sins, to be taught the meaning of the kingdom of heaven which was at hand, to be baptized into the new life, and to be filled with an eager expectation of the Messiah of God. All true penitents who inquired the way of life found in this severe ascetic a sympathetic friend and a patient teacher. There was no mystery either in his system or his sermons; no vague and high-sounding words; on the contrary, he spared no pains to adapt his instructions to their special condition and circumstances. While John's immediate disciples imitated his own ascetic piety in their preparation as preachers of repentance, he did not require any of the people to abandon their ordinary line of life, even when it was one obnoxious to his Jewish prejudices. All he asked was that they should fulfill their respective duties with honesty and fidelity. He emphatically commanded all alike to do good; but only those who were engaged in out and out sinful occupations were required to abandon them. Luke alone gives us a detailed account of the manner in which the preacher strikes at and most effectually hits their prevailing sins. Luke iii, 1-18. His one object is to prepare the way of the Lord, to furnish full scope for the kingdom of heaven; and to

do this he must tear down the kingdom of Satan, he must work a genuine and thorough reform. He bade them bring forth fruits worthy of repentance, otherwise they should be destroyed like a worthless tree fit only for the ax and the fire.

And they asked him, "What shall we do then?" that is, as works to show the genuineness of our repentance, that we may escape the boldly threatened wrath. In reply to their question he points them to their besetting sins, and plainly tells them that, if their repentance be scriptural, they will at once abandon those sins. He makes a practical application of the truth, and he wants practical results. We have only a sketch of the conversation between the prophet and these candidates for the baptism of repentance; but, from the whole tenor of his life and teachings, we are to conclude, as a matter of course, that he did not fail to join the Gospel to the law, and to show his hearers that, if thus repented of, sin would be forgiven through the forbearance of God, in view of the atonement to be made by the quickly coming Messiah.

In his reply John groups the multitude into three classes, and he first says to the *people*: "He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise." Thus he rebuked the spirit of selfishness and legal or illegal robbery that prevailed in that day and unfitted the nation to come to Christ when he should

appear; and he prescribes, as a proof of true contrition and heart-readiness to receive the truth, the very reverse of that spirit, to be illustrated in works of benevolence and love, anticipating the pure precepts of the apostle who said: "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." James i, 27. In this John showed his exact knowledge of human nature; for if the surplus of the rich and the comfortable, both in food and clothing, should find its way in charity to the poor and destitute it would be good evidence that repentance was more than a mere form with at least a portion of his hearers.

The second class addressed are the *publicans*, who were very unpopular with the people at large, because they had accepted office under the Roman government, and, consequently, represented a hated foreign dominion. Their covetousness had overridden their conscience and their patriotism at the outset, so it is not strange that they often extorted more than the regular rates of taxes, and, by pocketing the surplus, became quickly rich. John was too wise a man to deny the right of the existing government to levy and collect reasonable taxes for its maintenance; but the publicans, as a class, had misrepresented the government and abused their power, and so fostered dishonesty and selfishness in the land, and sadly lowered the tone of public morality. So, without



wasting words, he added the force of his stern command to the authority of their aroused consciences, and plainly told them to cease exacting from the defenseless people more than was just—thereby sowing good seed, which came to its harvest at least in the heart of one publican of Jericho, who some three years afterward was prepared not only to entertain Jesus as his guest in his own house, but to receive him as his personal Saviour from sin, thereby becoming, not in name alone, but in very truth, “a son of Abraham.” Luke xix, 1-10.

In the congregation were also many *soldiers*, representing a most numerous and important class in those turbulent times. To such of these as were truly penitent he said: Prove your penitence by being good soldiers, by obeying orders in the proper performance of your military duties; but cease all that illegal violence which makes you ruffians and robbers instead of defenders of the nation and supporters of just law. And to this he added the command, “Be content with your wages,” without pillaging the people, thereby plainly sanctioning their continuance in military service, since war, as an act of government, under certain circumstances, is not contrary to the divine law, but most evidently a part of its execution.

These answers to the question, “What shall we do?” were exactly adapted to the times, and, as sharp reproofs of current evils, were worthy the great

preacher and prophet—the last of a line that, without exception, had dealt faithfully with Israel; of which a Nathan had reproachfully said to a mighty but sinning prince, “Thou art the man!” and an Isaiah had written, “Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?” Isa. lviii, 6, 7.

John would no longer countenance the national trust in external forms; he must, therefore, see broken-hearted contrition manifested by practical works before he could hope to see the fulfillment of the prophecies of the Messiah's advent and reign.

## CHAPTER XIV.

JOHN'S ATTITUDE TOWARD THE PHARISEES AND  
SADDUCEES.

FOR the most part John's rebukes were of a general character, but he made an exception in the case of the Pharisees and Sadducees, to whom his sharpest words had a special application. The Pharisees represented the aristocracy of orthodoxy, and were the self-appointed custodians of the national conscience. They were as intolerant of free thought and free speech as they were of every form of foreign faith. They were the national party. They had so consolidated the religious system of the fathers, and elaborated into detail the principles of the Mosaic code, as to effectually restrict and even enslave the spiritual life of the nation. The chains of creed and ritualism were well-nigh unbearable, but they were also unbreakable. The Sadducees, though ready to deny the resurrection and the immortality of the soul, were always among the foremost in seeking the highest judicial and sacerdotal offices; and while they professed to have no hope of a heavenly life they allowed no one to question their right to the best places in this life, and especially in the coming kingdom of the Messiah. They were subservient, as a

sect, to the Roman power. Pharisees and Sadducees alike made the proud boast, "We have Abraham for our father;" and, bitterly as they hated and opposed each other, they firmly joined hands in resisting all extension of Abrahamic privileges to the Gentile world. Aroused by the common excitement, and inspired by common curiosity, they came out into the wilderness to watch this new movement and to watch each other. They had ranked themselves among John's disciples with the selfish desire to secure for their class the prestige of his name. Although John had dwelt for years in the desert he seemed to be well informed as to affairs outside his retreat. It was not necessary, therefore, for him to be told who the Pharisees and Sadducees were, or what were their peculiar and distinctive faults. His keen spiritual insight at once penetrated the thin veil of deceit with which they sought to cover their real purpose in coming to his ministry, and he lost no time in exposing their hypocrisy with sharp and merciless words. He knew that they were the real corrupters of the nation; and although they, to a great extent, gave direction to public opinion, and he was really risking his life by offending them, he did not waver, even for an instant, but fearlessly revealed their true character to the people they had duped, following up his resistless attack with exhortations to repentance and offers of divine mercy. He valiantly pierced hypocrisy to the heart, although at

the same moment he might sign his own death-warrant. Says Whedon: "No apology must be made (as by Van Oosterzee) for the denunciatory preaching of John; no more than for the thunder and smoke of Sinai, or for the fire and brimstone of Gehenna. Neither commentator nor preacher should effeminately shrink at the 'mention of hell to ears polite.' Doubtless John applied precisely the right epithet, and threatened precisely the true destiny, to these future murderers of the Messiah he came to announce."\*

And he said unto them, "O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: and think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. And now also the ax is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire." Matt. iii, 7-10. As Elijah exposed and denounced the apostasy of his times, so this new prophet, regardless of himself, and thoughtful only of his mission, unhesitatingly threw the whole force of his eloquence and vehement zeal against the ritualism of the temple, the legalism of the schools, the vanity of hereditary pride, and the authority of tradition. "He was a sort of personified revolt against the law, written and oral. The image and authority of Moses do not

\* Comment on Luke iii, 7.



seem to exist for him; but the prophets, with their scorn of legal pride and privilege, ceremonial purity and observances, with their faith in the reality of righteousness and retribution, are so real to him that he appears the very incarnation of their spirit, the embodied voice of their God. Hence his message is moral, not political. His relation to the Roman cannot be directly determined; his relation to the Jew is apparent enough. He does not think that Judaism is the religion of Jahveh, or that Israel needs only freedom to be perfect. He can hardly be named a patriotic Jew; that is, if patriotism be fidelity to what his countrymen passionately revere. To him their national idea is abhorrent, and the attempts at realization but prove its evil. He thinks that people and rulers are alike guilty, that their supreme need is repentance, and the regeneration repentance alone can bring." \*

The Pharisees and Sadducees could not maintain their ground against the Baptist's searching glance and fiery words. They were no match for this honest champion of the truth and the nation's real interests. He plainly told them that he held his authority from a greater ruler than they represented. They were not accustomed to such a spirit as now confronted them. They were wont to receive great deference from the populace, but they soon saw that John neither feared nor respected them. He offered

\* Fairbairn, *Studies in Life of Christ*, p. 71.

them not one word of flattery, but he briefly and authoritatively told them that unless they repented of their iniquities, just like the common sinners whom they affected to despise, and brought forth the fruits of a genuine reformation, they would surely meet the wrath of the God of Israel, whom they had insulted and misrepresented.

Seeing that they came to scoff and criticise rather than to repent and confess, he speedily waxed fierce in his denunciations. He likened them to a brood of vipers, since the serpent had always been the emblem of a wicked race. He instinctively distrusted their sincerity, and sarcastically inquired *who* had warned *them* to flee from the wrath to come; as much as to say, "It must be by a special miracle if such hardened sinners as you are have been directed here by any but unworthy motives and unhallowed influences." With the inspiration of a true prophet he even divined their inmost thoughts of pride and self-righteousness, and, rising at once above the narrow prejudices of his race, he cried out, "You lead the people astray when you teach them that Israel alone can find favor with God; that the coming kingdom of heaven is to be strictly Jewish, by hereditary right, and all other nations are to be excluded therefrom. Begin not to say within yourselves, we have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you that God is able of these very stones of the desert, lying in countless numbers around, to raise up true

children to Abraham, and will exclude you, his pretended children, from the kingdom unless you repent!"

They cowered before him. They had thought he would be like a reed shaken with the wind, in their haughty presence; but they found him as firm and unyielding as the mountain oak. From others they had received fulsome flattery; from this man they received only scorn. He wore no soft clothing, and he had for them no soft words. He was a stranger to kings' palaces, and he despised the insincerity of courtiers.

But, notwithstanding all John's faithfulness to them, the Pharisees and Sadducees missed their opportunity at last. Their arrogant self-righteousness ruined them and the nation they ruled. All but a few of them, comparatively, rejected the counsel of God toward themselves, not having been baptized by John.\* These were the very men to whom Jesus afterward said, when they sent a deputation to him from Jerusalem, "Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition? . . . Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoreth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. . . . O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but

\* Luke vii, 30; Dr. Davidson's Tischendorf's Version.

can ye not discern the signs of the times?" Matt. xv, 3, 7-9; xvi, 3.

At various other times the vigorous eloquence of Jesus, when combating the hypocrisy of these rulers among the Jews, made a deep impression upon the people, and fully justified John's estimate of their insincerity and the perniciousness of their influence; as, for example, when he upbraided them in these severe words: "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! who have taken the key of knowledge and use it only to shut up the kingdom of heaven against men! Ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in. Woe unto you, for you are as graves which appear not, and over which men walk unawares! Ye fools and blind, who pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith; these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone. Blind guides, who strain your wine for a gnat and swallow a camel, woe unto you! Ye make clean the outside of the cup and the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. Blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within; then mayest thou look to the cleanliness of that which is without. Woe unto you, scribes and hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchrs, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto

men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites ! because ye build the tombs of the prophets, and garnish the sepulchers of the righteous, and say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. Wherefore, ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them that killed the prophets. Fill ye up then the measures of your fathers. Therefore also said the Wisdom of God, 'I will send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes ; and some of them ye shall kill and crucify, and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city : that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel, unto the blood of Zacharias, son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar. Verily I say unto you, It shall be required of this generation.' \* \*

From Matt. iii, 7 ; John v, 35, and a few other brief references by the evangelists, we conclude that while doubtless a majority of the Pharisees and Sadducees, intent only upon selfish and party aims, were offended, not to say enraged, by John's plain words and lack of sympathy with their pretensions, and therefore regarded his ministry with suspicion and hated him with a bitter hatred, still a few earnest,

\* Matt. xxiii, 13, 23-36 ; Luke xi, 44, as quoted, with foot-notes, by Renan ; *Life of Jesus*, pp. 297-299.



upright, and devout men among them were deeply impressed by his preaching, accepted him as a prophet of God, opened their hearts to his message of truth, and submitted to his baptism. John's harsh words were, therefore, only for the haughty and arrogant, who claimed a share in the coming Messiah's kingdom as their hereditary right, without either repentance or forgiveness. To all true penitents and sincere inquirers this son of thunder was transformed into an angel of consolation. He adapted his instructions, with minute care, to their special condition, and became their sympathetic, loving guide to peace and purity.

## CHAPTER XV.

## A MODEL PREACHER.

JOHN'S preaching was an authoritative proclamation, rather than a sustained argument or a specimen of fine rhetoric, albeit it was not lacking in either logic or literary skill. His mind and heart were so full of his great theme that there was room for nothing else. He had a certain definite object in view, and he took the shortest route to gain it. In this he showed himself the true orator. Like Demosthenes, by rousing his hearers to action he gave the fullest proof of his power. He was great in that he thoroughly understood himself, his hearers, and the occasion. He did not attempt too much. He knew very well that the spiritual regeneration of men was beyond his power, and he confined himself to the purification of the morals of the people, as preparatory to the more radical and greater work which was to be the glory of the coming kingdom. However great the temptation, he made no attempt to usurp the place of the true Deliverer, to gather about him an organized band of followers, to use his eloquence for pushing his personal plans or promoting his personal aggrandizement. He was content to have his work but a small part of a great whole. He was not am-

bitious to outrun God's plans or to interfere with God's order. He had been summoned from the wilderness by the Holy Spirit simply as a herald. He knew his place, and had the good sense to keep it. Hence he was great in his place and for his times. The Holy Spirit, who had called him not to found a kingdom but to proclaim it, never departed from him, and gave him not only eloquence to persuade and inspire men, but wisdom and strength to clearly see and faithfully pursue this line of duty.

His preaching had the merit of adaptation. He spoke to men of his own times; men with whose moral condition he was perfectly familiar, and of whose every-day life, methods of thought, prejudices, hopes, desires, and aims he was not ignorant. He approached them in no roundabout way, with no display of profound learning, with no use of the artificial rules of oratory, with no attempt to dazzle by his brilliancy or perplex by his subtilty. He discarded entirely the traditional methods of the scholars as unfitted for his purpose, and struck directly at the evil he was assailing; or in the fewest, plainest words imparted the instruction, or brought to bear the persuasion he believed his hearers needed. To each of the many classes flocking to hear him his preaching was intensely practical. He called things by their right names. Isaiah seems to have been his favorite writer, and from that prophet he borrowed such illustrations as the viper brood, God's

vineyard, God's trees and the felling that which was barren, the consuming fire, the threshing-floor and the winnowing shovel, and the giving bread and clothing to the poor. Isa. lix, 5; v, 7; vi, 13; x, 15; xviii, 5; xl, 24; i, 31; ix, 18; x, 17, etc. With such plain words and familiar figures he made his way straight to men's hearts in the most searching, fearless, downright manner. So, of course, he was popular in the sense that, however men might be displeased with his utterances, they could not stay away from his ministry. The object for which he preached was, first of all, an immediate and local one. He saw the necessities of the times, and aimed to meet them as quickly and as effectually as possible. The enemy of the coming Christ and the coming kingdom was entrenched in the Hebrew life and character, and, like a skillful general, John concentrated all his forces and moved at once upon the foe in the very citadel of his power.

John was thoroughly in earnest. His speech was sharp, sometimes abrupt; but he meant every word he said. Men understood him. There was no mistaking his meaning. Many of them did not like him. His contempt for their pet notions, and his fierce denunciations of their pet sins, made them so angry that they would have killed him had they dared; but he was genuine, he was real, and they were compelled to respect him and his message. His very life attested his earnestness. His utter in-

difference to earthly comforts, his homelessness, his singleness of thought, purpose, and work, all proved him to be supremely in earnest. Religion in Jerusalem had long been a thing of forms, and its very spirit had centered in externals. Thoughtful men felt that it was all a sham, although they lacked the courage to say so. But here was a man so real and true, who felt that religion is such an everlasting reality, that he dared tell his countrymen they were false, and were sliding into the abyss of spiritual as well as national ruin. Here was a man who had discarded forms, but who yet could feel the splendors of God shining into his soul. He therefore possessed one of the most important elements of success in preaching. A man may be impetuous, full of imperfections, sometimes hasty, and always stern, even at times inconsistent. John was; but if men see that there is no duplicity about him, that he is as real as he is human, he will have a compelling charm for them which gives him great advantage in the presentation of truth otherwise unacceptable, or in arousing men from indifference to action. The men whom a preacher seeks to reach and influence are usually keen-sighted. They readily detect a fraud. They can pardon almost any thing rather than a lack of sincerity. John came ruthlessly demolishing all idols, making enemies of the haughty and influential, and turning the religious world upside down generally. His countrymen sought him in the wilderness



first out of curiosity. No doubt many of them had already condemned the fanatic in their hearts. But as they listened he overpowered their captiousness, their hatred, their prejudices, their superstitions, and led them captive at his will. The secret of it all lay largely in the fact that he was real and he was in earnest.

John was bold and independent; not with the effrontery of egotism and personal vanity, not as one who is puffed up with the pride of lineage or learning, but as one who is commissioned to utter an all-important truth, and, at every hazard, to do an all-important work. Some have ascribed his boldness to a certain fierceness of temper which characterized the tribe of Levi, or to a military element said to have belonged to the Jewish priesthood; but, every thing considered, I think the more reasonable explanation is found in the fact that through his long period of preparation he had gained the habit of looking at things as they are, and especially of properly estimating moral evil. He had no patience with the nice distinctions which the man of the world and he who bids for popular favor were wont to make between various forms of sin. He had lived so long in close spiritual communion with God that he saw in sin only that which was evil and morally degrading, and therefore inexcusable. The time was short, the case was urgent; the kingdom of heaven was at hand; he was commissioned and equipped by the

Almighty, and to his own Master he must stand or fall; therefore, so far as his dealings with men were concerned, he ought to have been independent in thought and bold in action. John did not hasten to abandon his work when Jesus appeared upon the scene, as though his own responsibility had ceased; but he was firmly faithful to the end, until his prophetic utterance, "He must increase, but I must decrease," had received its literal fulfillment, and he himself had fallen a victim to the cruel hate of the ruler whose sin he had so fearlessly exposed. Men are so intrenched in their sinfulness or their indifference that no revolution has ever been accomplished without independence and boldness. Every great religious leader, especially, has been noted for these qualities. Compromises with wrong have never been popular with the men who have saved the world. All great things have been achieved for humanity in the name of absolute principles which admit of no contradiction and demand of their exponents that they either conquer or die.

John was a very fire-brand among the people. He belonged to no party; he asked for no human backing; he had unbounded faith in the truth he was commissioned to utter, and in its divine power to win its way and accomplish its purpose. In all this he was a model preacher. Human nature is ever the same. The same work of preparing the way of the Lord and making his paths straight is still to be car-

ried on, and there are no better methods than those the Baptist used so effectively. Men must still be made to know and feel their sinfulness. Repentance is still the only road to salvation. Christ cometh quickly after the preacher to every awakened and seeking soul.

With all his aggressiveness and force of character John was a man of marked humility. He ever held himself as second and subordinate to the coming of Christ. The kingdom which he declared to be at hand implied a king. The people whom he declared to be in bondage needed a deliverer. That king and deliverer was the divine and mighty One, for whom John was humbly but resolutely preparing the way.

At the moment of his greatest popularity and power he made haste to declare, "After me cometh one mightier than I;" and in all his preaching he loved to contrast his own insignificance with the coming King's greatness. He said that he was not worthy to bear the King's sandals, or to loose his shoe-latchet. He was only the humble friend of the Bridegroom; the Bridegroom was yet to come. He simply baptized with water unto repentance, as a preparation for a work to be wrought; the King would "baptize with the Holy Ghost and with fire," and thus effect a radical change in men. Taking Mal. iv, 1, for the text of one of his most impressive sermons, he declared that the coming King was to exercise the divine office and power of judge over men: to know

their hearts, and, like a man upon the threshing-floor with a winnowing-fan in his hand, to separate the good from the bad, gathering the wheat into his garner, but burning the chaff with unquenchable fire. "Every prophet of the Old Testament going before the face of Jehovah was a type of John the Baptist, who was to announce the advent of the God-man; and John, again, was the type of every apostle, preacher, or missionary who causes 'the voice of one crying' to be heard before the King himself can appear. This voice began to sound when Isaiah first perceived and interpreted it; it was heard with unusual power through John's instrumentality; it will not be silent till the last trumpet shall be heard." \*

Thus, from first to last a true preacher of the Gospel, he humbled himself and exalted Christ. He may never have comprehended fully the Christ. Like many another Jew of his day, he may have had deep moral feeling and but little spirituality. His strong, but national, and therefore narrow and selfish, moral sense may have made him an uncompromising expounder of the law while he was comparatively ignorant of the foundation principle of the new kingdom, which is love—love for the Gentile as well as the Jew. His fierce spirit might have led him to doubt the wisdom of Christ's first sermon at Nazareth: "He hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of

\* J. J. Van Oosterzee.

sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised." Luke iv, 18. Nevertheless, he was just the man for his place. He was sent to arouse and alarm men, to move them to action, to prepare the way of the Lord; and he did his work well.

It is unwise to say that the effect of his preaching was transient: that when the people escaped from the magnetism of his presence they forgot the truth he had spoken, and shook off the convictions of conscience; that the Pharisees, when they found they could not use him or corrupt him, denied point-blank the authority of his mission. John's preaching sifted his hearers, and while there was much chaff there was also much wheat. All whom he had really quickened were not satisfied until they found the Christ; and there were some choice souls among them. We need no better proof of the abiding power and spirit of John's preaching than we find in Peter and John, Andrew, Philip, and Nathanael, whose desires he had aroused, and who hopefully waited near him for the appearing of the Messiah. They were no ordinary men. They were great men, fitted and waiting for their time and place. They became the pillars of the new Church, the glory of which has now filled all the earth.



## CHAPTER XVI.

## THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN.

THE kingdom of heaven was no new idea to the Jews of John's day; neither was his enthusiastic declaration that this kingdom was at hand any particular surprise to them. They looked back with a justifiable pride to the time when Jehovah was regarded as the King of Israel; the time when this title was so exclusively appropriated to him that no human being was either appointed or desired to rule over the people. And even when Saul was anointed king, and when afterward a royal dynasty was founded by David, the sovereignty of God was still the foundation principle of the nation and its political institutions; and loyalty to his government was the one condition upon which the happiness and prosperity of both king and people depended. In John's day the theocracy, with the glory it insured to the nation, was sorrowfully regarded by all true Jews as a thing of the past. They were under the iron rule of a hated foreign power. Greek and Roman influences and principles permeated the entire life of the people. Even the sect of the Pharisees, which had been formed for the express purpose of stimulating

and preserving the Jewish spirit and feeling, and was the bitter foe of foreign thought or customs, seemed powerless to arrest the process of national disintegration which was slowly but surely going on. Still, the more learned and devout Jews believed, from their computation of the prophetic periods, that the Messiah was soon to come and restore all things. This belief they had declared to the people, and their peculiar political circumstances, and a general state of fermentation in the public mind, had somehow awakened a prevailing expectation that when the Messiah came it would be as a revolutionary leader, to overthrow their oppressors and re-establish the nation upon its original basis.

There had been numerous attempts to hasten that day of the Lord. In John's infancy, Judas the son of Sariphæus and Mattathias had sought to bring in the reign of the Messiah by an extensive political rising which was characterized by that fanatical zeal and courage peculiar to the Hebrews, and was only crushed out by fierce fighting and much bloodshed. In his boyhood, Judas the Galilean had led another extensive popular uprising for the same end, but the result was as before, and the whole land was once more covered with mourning. Notwithstanding these failures, the idea of a successful religious war with Rome was a favorite one with most Jews. Their faith and courage were equal to the attempt at any moment. They only lacked a suitable leader, and

when one with sufficient ambition, skill, and daring should appear he would be sure of an immediate and extensive following. Even among the Samaritans there was a settled belief that the kingdom of God was near at hand, and that it would be of a political and military character. The ancient legend that Jeremiah had hidden the tabernacle, and the ark, and the sacred vessels, and the altar of incense in a hollow cave, and that they would be discovered by Messiah when he came, and would be the sacred tokens that the divine authority was re-established in Israel, was now revived, and the whole land was in a feverish state of excited expectation. So when John proclaimed, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand," the people thought they understood his meaning. He meant that the theocracy was now to be restored, that a new era was about to commence. The Messiah was to be the founder and monarch of the new kingdom, which should far surpass the glory of any that had gone before. It was a holy kingdom and a Hebrew kingdom. It would take the place of the Roman Empire in its universal dominion. All nations would submit to its authority, and it would last forever. Dr. H. R. Reynolds says of this period:

"Long brooding on the deep spiritual hints contained in their own Scriptures had enlarged the horizon of many thoughtful Jews, and made them anticipate, in the coming kingdom of God, a judg-

ment not only on their enemies, but on themselves. They had a dim hope that Messiah would come as a Son of man in the clouds of heaven, and would occupy the border-land between the two worlds; that the veil was on the point of being lifted by the King in his beauty, and that the great and notable day of the Lord was about to dawn in terror on all who do wickedly; that events of transcendent interest and of consummate personal as well as national moment were about to transpire. There is no perspective in prophetic picture. The entire future, including events more or less distant, appears equally near, nor are events seen along the same line and in the same plane of vision chronologically distributed. The atmosphere of earth does not penetrate this region, and there are no units of measurement by which we may gauge its distances. Hence the coming of 'the kingdom' involved the restoration of the kingdom to Israel (Acts i, 6), the restitution of the fallen tabernacle (Acts xv, 15, 16), the sufferings of Messiah (Matt. xvi, 21), and the glory that should follow.

"Messiah would come, they knew not 'whence.' He would, according to their notions of ruling, reign from Jerusalem over a subject world. There would be the predicted and coming wrath. There would be the judgment of the living and the dead. Cosmical changes, political revolutions, the re-appearance of departed saints, would accompany the entrance

upon his kingdom of Messiah the Prince. So when the last of the prophets cried, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand,' an electric shock thrilled through the nation. Now every throb of pain will be soothed, every wrong redressed, every fear hushed. The heavens will open to receive the faithful, and 'the Ancient of days' will be seen in his glory. The previous attempts to realize the ideal kingdom, the earthly types of this heavenly glory, had hitherto been imperfect and transitory; often corrupt, repeatedly disorganized by treachery, and more than once trampled into dust. The prophecy and promise of John must have awakened a passionate yearning."

John appeared to his countrymen in no new or strange character. They were familiar with the history of the ancient prophetic office, and John only revived its obsolete functions in the vehemence and fidelity with which he delivered his message. But it is evident that his conception of the coming kingdom was quite different from the popular expectation. Most of his countymen were looking for and talking of a purely external kingdom: he spoke of an internal kingdom. Their hopes were in a kingdom to come; he proclaimed a kingdom which had already appeared. He bluntly contradicted the Jewish notion that all who could justly claim Abraham as their father would have a birthright citizenship in the Messiah's kingdom, while all others would be excluded. He more than intimated that all their am-



bitious plans touching a temporal and conquering kingdom must be set aside; that the kingdom of heaven must be a purely spiritual kingdom, with just enough of the society, or outward organization, to insure its permanence and its economical propagation. The first step toward citizenship therein was his baptism of repentance, joined with fruits meet for repentance. Then, in the spirit-baptism to be administered by the coming Messiah, he sets forth the moral new birth by which they were to become naturalized in the new kingdom. Repentance, which included a consciousness of sin and a longing to be free from it, was necessary, and the new birth was necessary.

In saying that God was able of the very stones beneath their feet to raise up children unto Abraham, John seems to have had a prophetic presentiment that, even among the Gentiles, all who sought should find the Redeemer, all who asked should receive the bread of life, and to all who knocked the kingdom of heaven should be opened. In all this John was a true forerunner of our Lord; he was one with Christ in spirit and in teaching. The new visible but spiritual kingdom, with Messiah for its visible King, was to be inspired by the Holy Spirit of God, and thus a new condition was to exist in Israel, a new era was to dawn upon the nation, in which for the first time the true conception of the theocracy and its actual manifestation should precisely harmonize. As the sifting process should begin, and continue, many

unworthy Jews were destined to be excluded from the kingdom. This being true, the Messiah was not to go forth with flaming sword and overturn all enemies, and at once establish his kingdom in full splendor by the miraculous power vested in him. He was rather to so manifest himself that those whose hearts were prepared for his coming would know him at once, and from all classes and all nations and all circumstances be drawn to him, and, forsaking all, follow him; while, on the other hand, the mentally and morally blind and perverse, the spiritually proud, would not only deny him, but oppose him, seeking to destroy both him and his kingdom. Thus the inevitable fight between Christ and Antichrist must go on. Among the Jews and the Gentiles the sifting must be complete until, at last, the good, with Messiah at their head, shall come forth victorious, the whole earth be conquered by the spiritual forces marshaled against all forms of corruption, and the universal government be a universal theocracy. Says Dr. Reynolds: "Jesus admitted that 'the kingdom of God had come nigh' unto the Jewish people when he, the Lord and head of it, began before their eyes 'to destroy the works of the devil.' Luke xi, 20; 1 John iii, 8. But he showed them that though the kingdom was real and resistless it must be *within them*, and would not come with observation. Luke xvii, 20. Although it was being then set up in their hearts,

although for the first time in human history it embodied itself in the perfect life of the God-man, yet since it was a leaven hidden for awhile in the meal, a seed covered by the soil and sometimes choked by thorns or trampled on by the feet of strangers, it would be long before a triumphant proof of its presence could be given. Therefore the subjects of this kingdom were continually to pray, 'Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.' Matt. vi, 10."

John was a prophet; he therefore interpreted the kingdom of heaven in the prophetic sense as "the realized reign of the righteous God." In expressing this great idea Christ made use of two formulas—"The kingdom of heaven," and "The kingdom of God." There is here a slight difference of meaning. "The kingdom of heaven" indicated the nature and character of the new kingdom, whereby it is radically different from and antagonistic to the kingdoms of the world, that are established by intrigue and force and maintained by armies. "The kingdom of God" indicates the origin and purpose of the new kingdom, whereby it is set over against and is an everlasting foe to the kingdom of Satan, or of evil. Man was still the child of God, but through sin he had become estranged from the Father. But the kingdom of God, the kingdom of goodness, had for its avowed end the overthrow of sin and the restoration of man to obedience, and such an harmonious

intercourse with God that earth should be like heaven.

If we are to be guided by the classic use of the original word here translated "kingdom" we may with equal authority render it "dominion" or "reign." Both words convey the general idea of authority, but "kingdom" relates particularly to the reign or territory over which the authority of a king or ruler extends, while "reign" relates particularly to the influence which goes out from his person to control the characters and actions of his subjects. While the will of God is supreme with his subjects, and in the highest spiritual sense he reigns over them, there is still a place, a territory with its inhabitants, over which that reign extends, and which is definitely called his "kingdom." A part of that territory is here, while a part is beyond the limits of this world and this life; but in the entire kingdom God rules, and we are in perfect harmony with this fact when we pray, as our Lord taught us, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven."

In the New Testament the expression "kingdom of heaven" refers usually to the reign of God on earth. The thoughts of John and Christ and the apostles were not centered upon some heavenly state beyond the grave. They spoke of and labored to establish a heavenly state on earth, a present and complete rule of God in the heart, by which men

are here put in harmony with God, and so made capable of the highest spiritual development. They said but little of the heaven beyond this earth and this life. The heaven which they offered to man was a present good, a present state of purity and peace. They were not to wait in toil and strife, and disappointment and sorrow, to be rewarded for their faithfulness by some blissful state into which death should introduce them. They were to expect the kingdom of heaven, with all its blessedness, to come to them in this life. John said, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." Christ said, "The kingdom of heaven is within you." Paul said, "The kingdom of heaven is righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." When Christ ascended he left, as a precious legacy to his disciples, the promise of the Holy Spirit, to be in them a sanctifying, impelling, effective force for the extension of the kingdom of heaven among men. In further explanation of the spiritual life and power with which all true subjects of this kingdom were to be endowed, Jesus declared, "If a man love me he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him."

Whatever may be said or implied in the New Testament in regard to the future world, either in the use of the phrase we are now considering, or by expressions less general in their application, John and Christ seemed to consider that the present reign



of God on the earth ought to be the chief reason why men should repent of sin and turn unto holiness. They did not much urge either future happiness or misery as an incentive to a godly life here. They did not say, "Repent, for you must die and be judged; repent, or you shall be condemned to eternal separation from God and all goodness;" but they did say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand, and in it you shall find the present blessed results and rewards of true penitence."

The nature of this kingdom may be briefly set forth in the statement that, since God is its King, his will is the controlling power therein. The soul from which self-will is removed, in which all passions are subdued, conscience is quickened, the will of God is spiritually discerned, and the purified affections all prompt to a cheerful doing of that will, that soul is in the kingdom and under the reign of God. Like his Master he can say, "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me." In such a soul is the prophetic promise fulfilled, "I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it on their hearts."

We shall, however, get a more explicit definition of the nature of this kingdom in Paul's statement that "The kingdom of heaven is righteousness, and joy, and peace in the Holy Ghost." Man is not, naturally, either righteous, joyful, or peaceful. But through the spiritual new birth, the necessity of which Christ so earnestly urged upon Nicodemus,

man loses his sinfulness and selfishness, and not only in his obedience to the will of God, but in his own character, he becomes righteous. He is no longer in a state of disappointment and dissatisfaction, with a bitter sense of being baffled in his pursuit of all he deemed desirable; but instead he has entered into an experience of trust in God, which brings to him contentment and even joy in God's providences. He no longer fears God, or the present or the future—no, not even the judgment day—for he has found perfect peace in the Father's approval and smile.

In this experience lies the true scriptural test of conversion. When a man asks, "Am I a child of God, a naturalized citizen in the kingdom of heaven?" he has only to turn the light of the holy Scriptures full upon his daily inner soul-life and the vital question is answered. If he *has* righteousness, and joy, and peace in the Holy Ghost, then the kingdom of heaven is not merely at hand, not something that may soon be expected, but it has actually come, with all its glory and power, to his soul.

## CHAPTER XVII.

## THE BAPTIZER.

RIDING east, from the site of the Jericho of John's day, along the dry and uncultivated plain, in about two hours you descend a somewhat abrupt, clayey embankment to a flat, or terrace, which is sparsely covered with stunted trees and low shrubs. In a short time you are brought, by a second descent, to another terrace, where the willows and tamarisks and balsams grow so profusely that they form a thick, tangled jungle through which your horse can only pass by following one of the many paths cut here and there in every direction. Keeping directly east, in a few moments you pass down a third embankment, not quite so deep as the preceding, and find yourself in the bed of the river Jordan. You can easily ford the stream, unless you have arrived at the time of the spring or autumn floods, when the water has risen to cover the second, or perhaps the first, terrace of which we have spoken, and has become a raging torrent which you cannot safely attempt to cross. Josephus says that it was at this part of the Jordan that Vespasian's soldiers drove such multitudes of the Jews, in his day, into the

stream, when swollen by spring floods, that the river could not be passed over on account of the dead bodies that were in it (which might defile one), and the lake Asphaltitis was also full of corpses, carried down into it by the raging river.\* From this point it is but a few miles to where the Jordan mingles its waters with the bituminous waves of the Dead Sea.

Immediately on the eastern side of the river is a wilderness plain running some miles, and slightly rising, to the very foot of the Perea range of the mountains of Moab. In John's time, as now, there were no villages here, and men were obliged to encamp if they remained there at all. From this part of "the wilderness" Elijah went up to glory in a chariot of fire, hundreds of years before; and now, as the multitude flocked across the river and thronged the waste places to listen to John's fiery eloquence, to gaze upon his wild but commanding form, and to submit to his baptism, no wonder they thought the great Tishbite had "come again" with Jehovah's message to Israel. So far as surroundings were concerned, this wild spot furnished a most appropriate background for the strange scene in which John was the central figure. Beside the flowing stream fringed with waving cane-beds this last of the prophets lifted his voice. He was no "reed shaken by the wind;" he was in very truth, through the functions of his

\* *Bell. Jud.*, iv, 7, 6.

divine office, Elijah come again. But he was "more than a prophet;" he was the very forerunner, the herald who proclaimed the immediate advent of the mighty King, so long promised, who was to be "the hope of Israel."

Although John claimed divine authority for his proclamation, he did not (as we have already seen) present to the people the credentials of a single miracle; nor did his disciples, deeply as he impressed them and firmly as they believed on him, ever attribute miraculous powers to him. He sought no such gifts, and was content to await the complete indorsement which he finally received in the fulfillment of his amazing prediction.

And yet it seemed necessary that some test should be applied to his followers to prove the sincerity of their professions. He did not desire to attach them to his person, or to control them by his commands. They were to return each man to his place and employment in society, there to work out the problem of a true repentance, and to hold himself in readiness for the coming of the Lord. But before they departed some mark must be devised by which they could be distinguished from others, and by consenting to bear which they might prove the sincerity of their change and their loyalty to the principles they had embraced. Some initiatory rite was necessary, in which they might publicly declare their allegiance to the new king and kingdom, renew, as it were, the cov-



enant made between their forefathers and Jehovah, and formally enter not only upon a new service, but a new and purer life.

It is well known that many learned men have maintained that the baptism of proselytes existed among the Jews before the coming of John. Professor Stuart, representing a large class of profound scholars who hold to the opposite opinion, after a critical review of the question, decides that "the probability, on the ground of evidence, is strong against it." \* Referring to this fact, Dr. D. D. Whedon says: "John, then, was probably called the *baptist* as being the *first* baptizer. Passages like John i, 25, and Matt. xxi, 24-27, are most naturally explained under the view that John originated baptism proper by divine appointment, but in accordance with a Jewish expectation that something of the sort would be established." † Passages in the Old Testament like the following clearly indicate the ground of the expectation above referred to: "With joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation." Isa. xii, 3. "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean." Ezek. xxxvi, 25. "In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness." Zech. xiii, 1.

If, however, John was already familiar with the rite of baptism, as administered to such Gentiles as

\* *Bib. Rep.*, April, 1853.

† On Matt. iii, 1.

embraced Judaism, in public token of the fact that they had abandoned the moral defilement of their heathenism and now rejoiced in the purity of Hebrew citizenship, then it was naturally suggested to his mind, and, as the fitting sign and seal of which he was in search, readily lent itself to his purpose. In this case it already had a meaning which was universally understood; and by adopting it as the public token of a full acceptance of his teachings he lifted it above the low level of mere ceremonialism, and made it the symbol of spiritual realities. It now meant sin confessed and repented of; it betokened evil known, acknowledged, and put away, as well as good perceived and chosen.

John's baptism was a "baptism unto repentance," but it was also a baptism unto hope. No sooner had his followers renounced sin than they were filled with a great expectation. They stood as men whose loins were girded about, whose lights were burning, and who waited for the coming of their Lord; even the Divine One who was to impart a still higher significance to this familiar rite by baptizing with the Holy Ghost and with fire.

Dean Stanley says of the Baptist: "The grandeur of his mission lay in the keen discernment with which he seized hold of the one ordinance which had, as it were, been engendered by the full, flowing stream of the 'descending river,' to bring before his countrymen the truth, ever old yet ever new, that the clean-

ness, the whiteness of the human heart is the only fitting preparation for the divine presence. He took advantage of that leap into the river, or the reservoir, to call upon one and all to spring into a new life, to wash off the stain upon their honor and their consciences, which choked up the pores of their moral texture, and impeded the influx of the new truths with which the air around them was shortly to be impregnated. Matt. iii, 1, 4, 11, 12; Luke v, 33. He proclaimed the one indispensable condition of all spiritual religion, that the regeneration of the human spirit (Matt. iii, 11; Luke iii, 3) was to be accomplished, not by ceremonies or opinions, not by succession or descent, but by moral uprightness. The substitution of the wholesome, invigorating, simple process of the bath, in which the head and body and limbs should be submerged in the rushing river, for the sanguinary, costly gifts of the sacrificial slaughterhouse was a living representation in a single act of the whole prophetic teaching of the supremacy of duty. This startling note of the universal need for the creation of a new morality, for a transformation of the mind, struck a chord which had not vibrated since the days of Malachi. And of this the nearest contemporary likeness was in the Essenian maxim, 'The approach to duty is as a battle-field,' and in the three Essenian virtues, 'Love of God, love of goodness, and love of man.'\* Wherever any souls were

\* Josephus, *Ant.*, xviii, 1, 5; Philo, *Vit.*, *Contemp.*, 877.

penetrated with a sense of this truth, as the paramount definition of their religious calling, there a vast stride was made beyond the active religions of the ancient world, and toward the ideal of all of them." \*

It is hardly necessary to say that John's baptism was not Christian baptism; it was rather a token of preparation for that more significant rite. Whenever John's baptism is named in the New Testament there is always some adjunct limiting its import. It is called the "baptism of repentance," or "John's baptism;" it is never called simply "baptism," by which unmodified word the Christian ordinance is designated. The Messiah's kingdom was not set up until after John's baptism was instituted. John never administered his baptism in the name of Christ; therefore those who received it could not have been baptized into his authority, or into his kingdom. John simply required of his candidates a faith in the speedy coming of the Messiah, a faith which may be exercised by an unregenerate man; while Christian baptism distinctly requires a trust in Jesus's blood, shed for the remission of sins, as a ground of acceptance with God, and which can be exercised only by the regenerate. Those who were received into the Church by the apostles, after the kingdom of Christ was actually set up, were baptized in the name of the blessed Trinity, according to Christ's command, although they had

\* *History of Jewish Church*, Part III, pp. 214, 215.

previously received John's baptism; notably the disciples at Ephesus. Acts xix, 1-5. The great multitudes baptized by John did not thereby become even nominal Christians; there was no change in belief, and but little change in conduct. "His was a baptism of repentance and confession, ultimately leading to remission of sins. It was not a baptism of remission. John could not wash away sins. That cleansing from all unrighteousness for which he yearned was to be effected by another baptism, administered by other hands; not a baptism with water at all, but a baptism with fire and with the Holy Ghost. John knew that the call to repentance and to righteousness was not the same thing as the power to turn from sin; that the 'generation of vipers' could not, by any baptismal rite, nor by any thing short of divine power, become the brood of doves. He might move the passions and stir the fears of the multitude, so that, as Josephus says, 'they were eagerly ready to take his counsel, and accept his solemn warning.' But John was not exalted to *give* them repentance or remission of sins. He could not put them right with God, nor cleanse the thoughts of their hearts. He did not wield the supernatural force. He was not the source of a new life in our humanity. Among all the prophets none ever saw with such intense vividness as he the need of the Spirit-baptism. In commanding men to repent he found his impotence, and yearned for the great and notable day when the



Spirit should be poured out from on high. His baptism was a lively picture and emblem of a nobler work than his. By urging repentance and righteousness, and teaching men to hope for remission of sins, he helped to create the need which none but the Son of God could supply." \*

The Jew could make no mistake as to the meaning of John's baptism. It simply set him apart as one who desired and expected, when the Messiah's hour had come, to be introduced into the true kingdom of God. It was the baptism of repentance and reformation in preparation for an expected remission of sins. Christian baptism was the baptism of faith for the immediate remission of sins. John's baptism was a sign which made a necessary impression upon the minds of his followers, and prepared them for the great movement so soon to begin, and when its purpose was accomplished it readily gave way to a baptism which was higher and better. In submitting to John's baptism men confessed to a sense of danger, and a fervent desire to "flee from the wrath to come." They also confessed themselves sinners, and, therefore, deserving the chastisements of a just God. To avoid that chastisement John taught them—and in baptism they formally accepted his teaching as their only hope—that a renewal of heart was necessary, which, if they accepted and followed the expected Messiah, would come to them in such trans-

\* Dr. H. R. Reynolds.

forming power that it could be likened to nothing so aptly as to a new birth, a passing from darkness to light, or a resurrection from the dead. "Christ was to baptize with a holy Spirit and with fire. John felt his own baptism to have something cold and negative about it. It was a renouncing of definite bad practices. The soldier bound himself to refrain from violence, the tax-gatherer from extortion. But more than this was wanting. It was necessary that an enthusiasm should be kindled. The phrase 'baptize with fire' seems at first sight to contain a mixture of metaphors. Baptism means cleansing, and fire means warmth. How can warmth cleanse? The answer is that *moral* warmth does cleanse. No heart is pure that is not passionate; no virtue is safe that is not enthusiastic. And such an enthusiastic virtue Christ was to introduce." \*

It would be useless to enter here into an elaborate discussion as to the mode of John's baptism; especially as there exists, among our best scholars, such a diversity of opinions upon the subject. The expression "in the Jordan," so frequently used, may refer to the limits of either of its three banks, and, therefore, only indicates where the rite was performed; it in no way indicates the mode. The statement that Jesus, when he was baptized, came *out* of the water is no help to us, for the preposition properly signifies *from*. Such writers as Stanley, Geikie, Hanna, and

\* *Ecce Homo*, p. 14.

Lange, referring to the numerous ceremonial washings of the Jews, and the frequent plunging and bathing in the Jordan, which had been a sacred symbol at least since the days of Naaman, and depending upon some very old but not altogether trustworthy Jewish authority as to proselytes being submerged in a stream after they had been properly instructed in the law, and also attracted by the seeming fitness of the symbol if one of John's converts goes down into the river travel worn and soiled with dust, and after disappearing for a moment emerges pure and fresh, have concluded that immersion must have been the mode adopted by John. But what they have written upon the subject is certainly more an expression of opinion than an array of facts and arguments. To my mind the evidence, which is extremely limited on either side, is, on the whole, against immersion and in favor of aspersion or affusion. It is not made to appear that John had any precedent, in any of the practices of the Jews, for immersion. The multitudes coming to his baptism made immersion impossible, either by the hands of John or his immediate disciples; it could therefore have been practical only by each candidate submerging himself independently of the administrator, which would seem both imperfect and undignified, not to say inexpressive.

Dr. W. H. Withrow says in his valuable work on the catacombs of Rome: "The testimony of the catacombs respecting the mode of baptism, as far as it

extends, is strongly in favor of aspersion or affusion. All their pictured representations of the rite indicate this mode, for which alone the early fonts seem adapted; nor is there any early art evidence of baptismal immersion. It seems incredible, if the latter were the original and exclusive mode, of apostolic and even divine authority, that it should have left no trace in the earliest and most unconscious art record, and have been supplanted therein by a new, unscriptural, and unhistoric method." \* In fact, early Christian art invariably represents Christian baptism, notably the baptism of Christ, as administered by aspersion or affusion. It is therefore difficult to see just how it can be established that there is any warrant, from the practice of John, or Christ's disciples, or the early Church, for claiming that immersion is the only scriptural mode of baptism. Even if the Eastern Church, as some contend, but without sufficient proof, usually practiced immersion, it still could not have been regarded as the only valid form; neither could any particular mode have been deemed absolutely essential, since the Western Church, compelled, if for no other reason, by the requirements of a colder climate, the inevitable change of manners, and the convenience of custom, adopted and practiced almost exclusively the mode of sprinkling which has largely prevailed among Christians

\* For a full presentation of this subject see *Catacombs of Rome*, pp. 535-541.

down to the present day. Water baptism is but the symbol and picture of a spiritual baptism; and the "essence of the symbol" has always seemed more important, at least to the great majority of Christians, than the outward form, which has been fixed upon for local reasons, and as best adapted to existing circumstances.



## CHAPTER XVIII.

## THE BAPTISM OF JESUS.



BAPTISM OF JESUS.

THE authorities at Jerusalem were greatly disturbed by John's success with the people, and undoubtedly began plotting for his overthrow. Their representatives had failed to deceive him by their professions, or to ensnare him with

their crafty questions. They succeeded, however, in arousing his suspicions, and, like Jesus, not wishing to needlessly expose himself to danger, especially as he knew that his work was not yet done, he determined to seek safety by removing beyond the bounds of Judea. From the wilderness plain opposite Jericho he passed up the Jordan, probably to a small sunken plain which borders the stream "just beneath Scythopolis, where Gideon's Brook of Trembling makes its steep way from the eastern end of Esdraelon down

the Wady Jalùd, to the Jordan. He selected a spot near this on the eastern side, known in those days as Bethabara, where a ford crossed the river and gave abundant facilities for baptism."\* This new field rendered the prophet more accessible to the people of Galilee, and the excitement begun in Judea now continued with unabated intensity in this more northern province. Every town in the region north of the plain of Esdraelon and on the Sea of Galilee was represented in the eager throng which responded to the great preacher's call. John i, 44 ; xxi, 2.

When John's ministry had lasted about six months and his fame had extended even to the most out-of-the-way place in the land, Jesus, who was six months younger than John, and about thirty years of age, presented himself to the great preacher in Bethabara for baptism. He had heard in Nazareth the particulars of John's wonderful career, and had accepted the news as a sign that the full time for his own public

\* *The Holy Land and the Bible*, Geikie, vol. ii, p. 257 ; Lieut. Conder in Palestine Fund Report, April, 1875 ; Geikie, vol. i, p. 409 ; *Dict. of Bible*, art. "Bethabara." The most ancient manuscripts and the Vulgate read Bethany instead of Bethabara, but no place of that name is now known on the Jordan. Bethabara was introduced into the text by Origen, and Dean Stanley and others still maintain that it is the right reading. But Bethany has been restored to the text by Tischendorf and other learned modern editors. The spot mentioned above seems to meet all the requirements of the narrative, and thus has at least a very strong probability in its favor. No other locality on the Jordan will suit the circumstances so well.





Nazareth from the North.



ministry to begin had arrived. Thus far the duties of home and the labors of the carpenter's shop had absorbed all his attention. Nazareth, with its beautiful and highly cultivated valley and the magnificent views from the neighboring hill-tops, had been his world.

But now the hour had come for him to enter upon a broader field of action, to engage in a greater work. Jesus the carpenter henceforth was to be Jesus the Christ, while the home of his childhood would be to him only a pleasant memory. The associations of his young manhood must be broken, associations of such a tender character that the remembrance of them would make him feel all the more keenly the social loneliness of his future years. Hereafter an occasional brief visit was to be the only link connecting his busy, anxious, suffering life with the precious years in which, under the direction of his wise and holy mother, he had diligently prepared for his great mission. It was a day of sadness for both Mary and Jesus, a day in which their hearts were filled with painfully tender emotions and their minds weighed down with momentous thoughts and anxious questionings. And yet it was a day of holy joy for which they had long looked and waited and prayed; a day in which the steadfast faith of more than thirty years had come to its fruition.

Jesus, with many of his fellow-townsmen, joined himself to the company or caravan that was moving



toward the region where John was baptizing, and when he arrived at Bethabara he quietly and without notice took his place in the motley congregation and listened to the preaching of his herald.

Men have often asked the question, "Did the Holy Spirit, bringing a full consciousness of his Messiahship, come on Jesus at his baptism for the first time?" To that question no satisfactory answer will, probably, ever be given. Nor do we *need* an answer. There are mysteries about the work of the infinite Spirit of God which it were unnecessary for us to pierce even had we the power. We know that when Jesus went to John his life as our Teacher and Saviour began, and that is enough; that knowledge ought to satisfy us. By going down to Bethabara Jesus not only showed his approval of John's work, he also recorded his highest possible estimate of its importance and value. In no sense is he independent of John's work. The Messiah and the herald, though trained under the most diverse circumstances and influences, were in perfect accord at the very beginning of their public life. Each worked with all possible diligence and devotion in his allotted sphere, and in the exact order of Providence. Not once did either of them attempt to subvert or modify that order. The moment his work was accomplished John was content to step quietly aside, though at the very height of his popularity. When his hour had come, when he could best serve the world as its Sav-

hour, Jesus promptly presented himself, though he undoubtedly foresaw the terrible ordeal that was before him.

That was the supreme day in John's ministry when the quiet young carpenter from Galilee appeared in the congregation. It was the day which vindicated before all the world his authority, his claims, and his teaching, and forever joined his record to that of the Divine Man. All others in that listening throng were soon forgotten, but this modest, unobtrusive youth from Nazareth, a city which the haughty rulers and scholars around him despised, will never be forgotten—will never cease to be the most conspicuous figure in the history of the human race.

When nearly all the assembled people had been baptized (Luke iii, 21) Jesus offered himself as one of the last to whom the solemn rite was to be that day administered. Though cousins, John and Jesus had probably seldom met since their boyhood. They lived at opposite ends of the country, and John's many years of seclusion in the wilderness had almost entirely separated him from the ordinary associations of social life. They may have met a few times at the feasts of Jerusalem, which we know Christ attended, and which John, a thorough Jew, and rigorously trained in the creed and ritual of the old dispensation, would not be likely to neglect. Still, it is reasonable to suppose that, since his youthful days at least, John had looked upon the face of his cousin but few

times, and at long intervals. He could not, therefore, be expected to recognize him now off-hand, especially as he presented himself for baptism as merely one of the multitude, and with no word of greeting or explanation. If, however, John did recognize Jesus as his cousin, he certainly did not at first recognize him as the Messiah, for he unequivocally declares, "I knew him not." John i, 31, 33.

Gradually the revelation of Jesus's Messiahship was granted to him, and all previous knowledge of his kinsman was as nothing compared with the full blaze of heavenly light which flashed upon his soul when the final sign and testimony was given that this was indeed the Son of God. Says Irving: "A blind man who had received his sight during the hours of darkness might imagine, when the morning star first glinted through the lattice in the eye of dawn, that he knew the glorious meaning of light; but when the sun arose, bringing the day, he might with justice say, 'I knew it not.' There are degrees of vision, of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ, sufficient to explain the first hesitation of John and the burst of wonder when the heavens opened over him." \* John was in daily expectation of the Messiah's appearance in Israel, and, as his appointed herald, could not fail now to have at least a

\* See also Farrar's *Life of Christ*, vol. i, p. 117; Neander's *Life of Christ*, p. 70, Bohn's edition; Pressensé's *Life of Christ*, pp. 50, 51; Hanna's *Early Years of Christ*, p. 163.

strong impression that he was present. His heart went out toward the Christ in partial recognition, even though the promised Messianic sign had not yet been given. In appearance Jesus was wholly different from those with whom he mingled. There is a majesty about genuine goodness which commands respect and even reverence; and when the prophet looked upon that strong yet gentle face, so expressive of greatness of character and purity of life such as never before had appeared among men, he was at once conscious that he stood in the presence of some extraordinary personage. John's fierce spirit would not for an instant quail before an earthly king, were he Jew or Roman. He had only stern words for the greatest and proudest of men who came to him in a self-righteous spirit. But here was a soul of spotless purity; here were eyes from which shone the very light of heaven. Here was a brow upon which not only the highest beauty, but the tenderest love, the profoundest wisdom, the loftiest purpose, the holiest aspirations, and the most perfect fidelity to truth, all sat enthroned, and John was at once "overawed and captivated." Hitherto he had been confronted by a hard, deceitful people whose sins he had fearlessly and fiercely denounced, and for whom he had only the one message, "Repent! repent!" but now the Lamb of God, without spot or blemish, with a countenance before the majesty of which enemies were hereafter to shrink back and fall overcome to the ground (John

xviii, 6), stands before him. Instantly, with the inspiration of a prophet, he more than half grasps the mighty truth that this is the King himself, come at last to set up the kingdom of heaven among men. As quickly comes the thought, "The servant is not greater than his lord," and with a humility and gentleness which proved his own perfection of character, and shed an eternal luster upon his life, he declined to perform a rite which seemed to imply that he was Jesus's superior. As a mere form John could appropriately baptize Christ; but he was a baptizer of sinners unto repentance, a grace and a rite of which the sinless One had no need. Therefore, in words of reverent expostulation he said to the Master, "I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me?" Equally beautiful was the reply of Jesus, "Suffer it to be so now (since it is but a momentary relation between us): for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness." As though he had said, "This act of mine has an especial meaning, although you do not seem to understand it. It does not mean repentance on my part, but it will fulfill all righteousness. It is becoming my mission to submit to humiliations; it becomes your office to recognize my submission, and together we may meet every legal and official requirement." \* Then he suffered him.

"How does the baptizer look upon him? With a quiet countenance, as he would regard an ordinary

\* See Whedon on Matt. iii, 15.



person? Had he not already conceived for Jesus an unspeakable reverence? He has just now refused to baptize him, before whom he felt himself as nothing. Again and again he has said that he was not worthy to unloose the latchets of Jesus's shoes. To John's mind the moment was one of breathless excitement. To Jesus as well the occasion is of untold interest. Whatever it was to others, the rite was no formality to him. We can scarcely conceive what were his feelings. Binding himself irrevocably, and in spotless pureness of spirit, to the work he undertakes for the world; giving himself up to the perfect will of God, he has now, if he never had it before, a complete certainty of his own life and destiny. He makes real before the world the wish, the purpose, the eager desire, which has before existed in the depth of his own bosom." \* Self-consecration, perfect faith, perfect love, and certainty of the Father's presence and favor, are all written upon his divinely illumined and beautiful face as John leads him to the baptism. Never was the symbol of spiritual integrity and purity so befitting its place and use as now.

While John was administering the solemn sacrament the full prophetic inspiration fell upon him, and, coming up from the water, both he and Jesus (Matt. iii, 16; John i, 32) saw the heavens open, and the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove descend and

\* Dr. Furness.

hover over and at last rest upon the head of Christ. Neander truly says: "In this John saw a sign of the permanent abode of the Holy Spirit in Jesus; not merely as a distinction from the inspired seers of the old dispensation, but also as the necessary condition of his bestowing the divine life upon others. It indicated that the power of the Spirit in him was not a sudden and abrupt manifestation, as it was in the prophets, who felt its inspiration at certain times and by transitory impulses; but a continuous and unbroken operation of the Holy Ghost, the infinite fullness of the divine life in human form. The quiet flight and the resting dove betoken no rushing torrent of inspiration, no sudden seizure of the Spirit, but a uniform unfolding of the life of God, the loftiness yet the calm repose of a nature itself divine, the indwelling of the Spirit so that he could impart it to others and fill them completely with it, not as a prophet, but as a Creator." \*

John probably did not fully comprehend the "essential unity of the divine and human," which was thus consummated in his very presence, as we who are believers in Christ now do; but he grasped it as far as possible from his stand-point, especially when it was more definitely and clearly indicated to him by an audible voice proceeding from heaven, or what men would call the opening firmament or sky, from whence had come the dove-like form, and saying,

\* *Life of Christ*, p. 71.

“This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” These words “cannot possibly be applicable, in their full meaning, to any mere man, but to him alone in whom the perfect union of God and man was exhibited and the *idea* of humanity completely realized. It was this union that made it possible for a holy God *to be well pleased* in man. The voice was the *expression* of the idea which the vision itself involved. We consider then that the vision and the voice contained a subjective revelation of the Holy Spirit, intended exclusively for the Baptist, to convince him thoroughly that he whose coming he had proclaimed and whose way he had prepared had really appeared.”\*

John the Baptist heard the voice and knew the truth. He knew that the Spirit of God had come then and there upon him whom he had been persuaded to baptize. “I saw it,” he says—“I saw the Spirit descend as a dove descends.” It was, indeed, a most beautiful and impressive symbol. The terminology of the Christian Church, the poetry and art of the Christian era, have caught up the word and glorified the figure. The gentleness and purity of the swooping dove will ever be the types of God’s own Spirit dwelling with certainty in the hearts of his children, and making clean and holy his earthly kingdom.

Here we have a dramatic or scenic illustration of

\* Neander’s *Life of Christ*, p. 72, and foot-note.

the Trinity. The incarnate Son is proclaimed by the voice of the Father and consecrated and witnessed by the Holy Spirit. As for John, he had rapidly passed through an experience which would have unsettled the mind of a man less strong and holy than he. From ignorance, expressed in the words, "I knew him not," he had passed to active faith as consciousness of the Messiah's presence began to dawn upon him, and from thence to abiding knowledge when the divine voice broke upon his expectant ear. Now he could honestly and emphatically identify Jesus to the world as the veritable Lamb of God.

✱ This baptism scene marked the birth-hour of Christianity. From this moment it had a place, if not a definite name, in the world. Henceforth it was to be a living, visible, growing, divine force among men. The pure white flower of the Gospel had begun to blossom upon the quickened stalk of the law, and as petal by petal it unfolded the nations were amazed by its heavenly beauty, and the whole earth was filled with its fragrance. ✱

Why did our Lord submit to John's baptism? From the earliest times his motive has been variously conceived by Christian writers. Jerome says: "In the Gospel which the Nazarenes use there is the following narrative: 'The mother of the Lord and his brethren said to him, John the Baptist baptizes unto the remission of sins: let us go and be baptized by

him. But he said to them, In what have I sinned, that I should go and be baptized by him? unless, by chance, this very thing which I have said is ignorance.'”\* Thus from the beginning the Church has always recognized a difficulty in the fact that the spotless son of God should observe a rite which was practically a confession of sin. Jerome, as quoted by various writers on this subject, considered the baptism of Christ to have been “the final cause of the baptism by John, as providing the ready means by which the forerunner would introduce the Christ to the multitude; that thus, moreover, authority would be given to the ministry of John, and that (as Augustine said) men would not henceforth hesitate to go to the baptism of the Lord himself, since he had not hesitated to submit to the baptism of his servant.” John Calvin said: “The general cause why Christ was baptized was that he might perform obedience unto his Father, and the special cause was that he might in his own body consecrate baptism, that it might be common to us with him.”†

Christ evidently ranked his action in seeking John's baptism among those of his Messianic calling. In his expression, “fulfill all righteousness,” he announced that he not only fulfilled in his own person the law of the Abrahamic covenant in circumcision, but also the spiritual law of Christianity which he

\* *Adv. Pelagian.*, Lib. iii, as quoted by Dr. Reynolds.

† *Harmony of Gospels, in loco.*



was about to establish, and of which baptism was to be the appointed emblem.\*

It seems clear that though Jesus was sinless himself he, nevertheless, accepted the baptism of repentance because he was to bear the sins of others; to be tempted, to accept a burden of moral miseries, to suffer keenest anguish, and at last to die for the race he came to represent. While it is a mystery which even the angels may never fully solve, it must, nevertheless, be acknowledged that Christ Jesus, the Divine One, not only touched a fallen race, but entered into a most absolute union with it. This is graciously made to appear at the baptism, as well as in Gethsemane and on Calvary.

“Christ assumed humanity that the penal liabilities of humanity might be imputed to him.” In this act of baptism the holy, sinless human nature of Jesus confessed to a sense of absolute dependence upon the Father. True, he was then and always John’s superior in nature; but in administering the rite of baptism John held, for the time being, and by divine appointment, a higher office. He was like the Chief-Justice of the United States, who on inauguration day administers the oath of office to the incoming President, and for the moment is the President’s official superior. Jesus was appointed to the highest and most sacred office ever held by man,

\* Compare McClintock and Strong, arts. “Baptism” and “Sacrament.”

and it was John's honorable prerogative, by administering the solemn rite of baptism, to induct him into its holy duties. Every man was to have his own place in the coming kingdom. John the evangelist, Andrew, James, and Peter were baptized for fitness as apostles; others were baptized as subjects; but Christ was baptized as king.\* This rite of preparation and consecration marked the beginning of a new course of life. This new life was already within Jesus, and was to be gradually unfolded; while with his followers it was to be received from without, from a divine source. "The baptism of the members of the new kingdom prepared them to *receive* pardon and salvation; that of Jesus was his consecration to the work of *bestowing* those precious gifts."

The connection of the baptism of Jesus with his temptation must not for a moment be lost sight of. Matthew, Mark, and Luke have all, in their narratives, knit the two scenes so closely together that their evident design was to impress us with their inseparability. "It is not in the noise and bluster of John's great camp-meeting that the Saviour stays. He had been willing to show that he is of the world, and not above the world. He is Son of man, though he be Son of God. But his kingdom is not of observation. His reign is not to be marked by camps, or the gathering of armies. Let John Baptist com-

\* Compare Whedon on Matthew, p. 53.

plete his work of preparation. Not till preparation is over will the Nazarene begin. So is it—very likely to John's disappointment, perhaps to the surprise of Mary Mother and of the others who knew that his leaving Nazareth meant something for mankind—so is it that, all willed with God's own Spirit, Jesus leaves the camp, leaves the throng of men, and goes alone into the wilderness. It is not in camps, it is not in throngs, it is in the lonely life of the obedient Son that the rescue of the world is to begin." \* We shall fail to apprehend the full significance of the temptation scene if in our thoughts we dissociate it from the wonderful revelation and proclamation on the banks of the Jordan. Augustine, somewhat extravagantly it would seem, calls the Lord's baptism "his second nativity." Without further reference, however, to the question thus suggested, it is safe to say Christ in that baptism was fully invested with his divine armor, and immediately retired to the wilderness to test its strength and temper on a fair field, and in a fair fight with the arch-fiend who so easily overthrew the first Adam in Paradise. His was a baptism of temptation and anguish and grief and blood, as well as a baptism of water. As we have not overstated the significance of the baptism scene, so we cannot estimate too highly the importance of the struggle and the victory whereby the second Adam forever triumphs over man's most subtle and dan-

\* Dr. E. E. Hale.

gerous foe, and forever offers himself to a weak and buffeted race as able to succor all who henceforth are tempted, with a sympathy and grace which shall be sufficient for them.

Ruskin, in speaking of the baptism of Christ as a subject for art, and particularly of Tintoret's noted picture of the scene, says :

“ However important, and however deep in its meaning, it supplies not to the ordinary painter material enough ever to form a picture of high interest. From the purity of Giotto to the intolerable, inconceivable brutality of Salvator, every order of feeling has been displayed in its treatment; but I am aware of no single case, except this of which I am about to speak, in which it has formed an expressive picture. Tintoret has thrown into this picture his utmost strength, and it becomes noble in his hands by his most singular imaginative expression, not only of the immediate fact, but of the whole train of thought of which it is suggestive; and by his considering the baptism not only as the submission of Christ to the fulfillment of all righteousness, but as the opening of the earthly struggle with the prince of the powers of the air, which, instantly beginning in the temptation, ended only on the cross. The river flows fiercely under the shadow of a great rock. From its opposite shore thickets of close, gloomy foliage rise against the rolling chasm of heaven, through which breaks the brightness of the descending Spirit. Across

these, dividing them asunder, is stretched a horizontal floor of flaky cloud, on which stand the hosts of heaven. Christ kneels upon the water, and does not sink. The figure of St. John is indistinct, but close beside his raised right arm there is a specter in the black shade; the Fiend, harpy-shaped, hardly seen, glares down upon Christ with eyes of fire, waiting his time. Beneath this figure there comes out of the mist a dark hand, the arm unseen, extended to a net in the river, the spars of which are in the shape of a cross. Behind this the roots and under-stems of the trees are cut away by the cloud, and beneath it and through them is seen a vision of wild, melancholy, boundless light, the sweep of the desert; and the figure of Christ is seen therein alone, with his arms lifted as in supplication or ecstasy, borne of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.

“There are many circumstances which combine to give to this noble work a more than usually imaginative character. The symbolical use of the net, which is the cross-net still used constantly in the canals of Venice, and commonly throughout Italy, is of the same character as that of the carpenter’s tools in the Annunciation; but the introduction of the spectral figure is of bolder reach, and yet more that vision of the after-temptation which is expressly indicated as a subject of thought rather than of sight, because it is in a part of the scene which in *fact* must have been occupied by the trunks of the trees whose tops are



seen above. And another circumstance completes the mystic character of the whole: that the flaky clouds which support the angelic hosts take, on the right, where the light first falls upon them, the shape of the head of a fish—the well-known type both of the baptismal sacrament and of Christ.” \*

\* *Modern Painters*, vol. ii, pp. 172–174.

## CHAPTER XIX.

## THE THREEFOLD TESTIMONY.

IMMEDIATELY after the temptation, which occurred somewhere in the wilderness between the plain of Jericho and Jerusalem, the victorious Jesus returned to the banks of the Jordan, and mingled again, unnoticed and unknown, among the disciples of John. The time had come for his public ministry to begin, but he was not to announce himself. John had been divinely appointed to receive the evidences of his Messiahship, and to officially introduce him to the expectant nation; and he patiently awaited the Baptist's movements. On the day of Jesus's return a delegation from the Sanhedrin at Jerusalem arrived in camp, with full authority to question John as to his character and claims, and to demand of him an unequivocal declaration of the nature of his strange mission. These deputies undoubtedly cherished some hostile purpose in their hearts; but outwardly they approached the great preacher with true Oriental politeness, giving expression alike to the curiosity of the common people and the deep desire of the learned and devout throughout the land, in the straightforward question, "Who art thou?" They still were smarting under

John's scathing denunciations of the hypocrisy and selfishness of the aristocratic class to which they belonged; and they knew if they could entrap him into an open profession of a particular mission, undertaken by some especial authority, they would have the right to arrest him for stirring up such a popular excitement, and compel him either to make good his claims or submit to punishment as an impostor. But with all their adroitness John was more than a match for them. With true prophetic insight he at once detected their insincerity, and with true prophetic skill he not only thwarted their sinister purpose but seized upon a most favorable opportunity to make an important and startling announcement. Some of his more sanguine and ambitious disciples may have given out that their Master was the Messiah himself; and as such news would naturally travel rapidly from mouth to mouth, especially when society was in such a ferment of excitement and expectancy, it undoubtedly had reached the ears of the dignified but watchful rulers at the capital. John at first silenced all such false rumors by an explicit denial, creditable alike to his head and his heart, to his wisdom and his loyalty. He said, "I am not the Christ." John i, 19-28. Another report that may have been spread abroad was that the prophecy of Malachi was now fulfilled, and that the Baptist was the veritable Elijah returned from heaven to preach, with his old-time vehemence and fire, a new gospel, near the very spot from which

he had ascended to glory. Mal. iv, 5. So these official examiners, following up their first question by a second equally direct, asked John, "What then? Art thou Elias?" To this he gives a prompt and emphatic negative.

It was generally believed that the prophet foretold by Moses, as like unto himself—which some of the learned doctors identified as Jeremiah—would accompany Elijah on his return to the earth; so the deputies put to John the further question, "Art thou that prophet?" and he bluntly answered them, "No."\* At last, leaving all conjectures and suppositions, they said unto him again, "Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself?" John would not tell them *who* he was, but he seemed willing to at least give them an inkling as to *what* he was. Therefore, taking up a reference to the prophet Isaiah (Isa. xl, 3), which they readily understood, and in which he claims the dignity of being foretold by ancient prophecy, he said, "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias." As has been said, "John humbly yet sublimely pronounced himself to be not the Word, but a *voice*; yet what a voice! the heraldic voice of a divine warning to prepare the way for the great King." Lange says, in his *Life of Christ*: "Clement of Alexandria calls the Baptist the *voice* or *sound* of the

\* Matt. xvi, 14; Herzog, vol. vi, 482; ix, 432; 4 Esdras ix, 18.

Logos. This expression is ingenious ; though we must remark that the Logos has his own peculiar sound, and John his own special mode of thought proceeding from the life of the Logos. If we adhere to Clement's figurative language, we may say that John is to be regarded as a clear trumpet-tone in which the Israelitish feeling for the Messiah expresses itself, and his forthcoming manifestation was announced ; or as the clear response which the sound of the incarnate eternal Word, in his New Testament fullness, called forth in the last and noblest prophet of the Old Testament dispensation." \*

Every true preacher may call himself a "voice," an utterance from the life and word of God. Through him God really speaks with a tone of power and authority that awes. It was not so much John's marvelous gifts as an orator as his living power of devotion to a great truth that commanded the attention of men and held them spell-bound while, as it were, the very thunders of Sinai burst upon them and sent them to their knees with cries of contrition and pleadings for mercy. God has always honored the voice of the living speaker when he would make lost, or sorrowing, or oppressed, or burdened, or self-sacrificing men feel the nearness and reality of his presence to lift up and to save. Notably did he thus honor the voice of John. When the people heard the voice of that sublime child of the wilderness, they felt that its tones broke

\* Vol. ii, p. 10.



from a holy and mighty life within. The living voice became a living power, revealing God's justice and mercy, and arousing men to honest deeds betokening honest purposes.

Too blind and bigoted to see the just force of John's claim, the questioners, who were of the sect of the Pharisees, and strenuously held that "no prophet, after Moses, had a right to introduce any new sacred usage, rite, or ceremony among the Mosaic institutions, except the arrived Messiah himself," changed their tactics, and tried to entrap John by peremptorily challenging his authority for the sacred rite he was daily administering to his followers. They therefore asked him, "Why baptizest thou, then, if thou be not Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet?" John now utterly refused to recognize their jurisdiction and right to interrogate him; but their last demand served to unloose his tongue, and gave him an opportunity to bear his first exact testimony to the Christ who had already been divinely revealed to him; and he answered them: "I baptize with water: but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not; he it is who, coming after me, is preferred before me, whose shoe-latchets I am not worthy to unloose."

Dr. Lange remarks that "John's testimony is stronger here than preaching, stronger even than prophecy as hitherto existing. He appeared first as a preacher, a preacher of repentance. But the

preacher showed himself at the same time a prophet, announcing under divine impulse the approach of the Messianic kingdom. And then, in the miraculous manifestation at the baptism of Jesus, through the testimony of God he became a witness of the person of Jesus of Nazareth that he is the Messiah; so to speak, an apostle before the apostolate. As a prophet who, by divine commission, pointed to the Messiah, he completed the Old Testament prophecy in testimony. And for this testimony he was come. His mission rose into the office of forerunner. And even his martyrdom, in the strict sense, is in keeping. He sealed his preparatory preaching of repentance with his death."\*

The deputies from Jerusalem, being on the search for occasion against John and not for profitable knowledge even of the expected Messiah, and gathering but little satisfaction from the Baptist's replies, evidently did not trouble themselves to make any further investigations as to who and where this other person, greater than John, was, but took up their homeward journey conscious that they had been baffled and defeated in their malignant purpose, and no doubt thoroughly ashamed of the meager report they should be obliged to give on the morrow to the waiting Sanhedrin.

So another day passed and Jesus remained unknown. It was necessary for John to point him out;

\* On John i, 7.

and this fact confirms our belief that none but Jesus and John saw the dove or heard the voice on the day of the baptism, else many of John's disciples would have been quick to recognize the divinely proclaimed One on his return from the desert. But, as it was Jesus was hidden in the very midst of the multitude until John's hand lifted the veil of obscurity.

The very next day witnessed the climax of John's career; but it came, as great historical events often come, in a manner so simple and unostentatious that at the time it attracted but little attention. Jesus singled himself out from the people among whom he had been "standing," and quietly approached the prophet, as though he would give him the opportunity he sought. John i, 29. The multitude saw only a singularly beautiful and attractive young man, with great dignity of person and gentleness of manner; but John, whose eyes had been opened, saw in this unassuming Nazarene the inspiring Hope of the ages, the Saviour of the Jew first but also of the Gentile, the pledged Word of God, the rightful King of the new kingdom, and, with words which must have thrilled the hearts of all within reach of his ringing voice, he sounded forth the proclamation for which the ages had been listening, and toward the publishing of which his entire life and ministry had converged: "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred be-

fore me ; for he was before me. And I knew him not : but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water. And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. And I knew him not : but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God." John i, 29-34.

John was speaking now under the prophetic impulse, and may not have himself understood the full import of all his words ; but, making no reference to those titles of the Messiah which were especially popular with the Jews—such as “ Jesus the Messiah,” the “ Prince,” and “ King of Israel,” etc.—he applied to him two titles which, while they were scriptural, were afterward especially offensive to the Jews, who made the assumption of them by Jesus the ground of their charge of blasphemy against him. “ Lamb of God ” and “ Son of God ” are the most comprehensive titles which the Baptist could possibly have bestowed upon the Christ ; for while they have but slight reference to his royal dignity, and therefore could not meet the popular idea, they present the shortest, most distinct and compendious statement of the Gospel of the kingdom that can be found either in or out of the Scriptures. The spotless human nature of

Christ, his divine nature, the freeness and completeness of the Father's sacrifice, the efficacy of Jesus's shed blood, and the consequent fullness of the salvation offered to all who believe, are here most clearly and strikingly set forth. Lamb of God was a term full of meaning to the men of Israel, who were familiar with the promise of their father Abraham to Isaac on the way to the mount of sacrifice (Gen. xxii, 8), and they did not need Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews to enable them to understand its real import. Perhaps, as Dean Milman suggests,\* one of those large flocks of lambs intended for the temple sacrifices was just then passing from the rich pastures of Perea to the ford beside which John was baptizing, and may have turned the mind of John toward the old prophetic symbol of Christ, and led him to formulate and helped his hearers to understand the meaning of the title "Lamb of God." At any rate the people were accustomed to see every day two lambs sacrificed upon the great altar of the temple, one in the morning and one in the evening; and they knew that somehow those sacrifices, in connection with other sacrifices and ceremonies of their national ritualism, prefigured the expiation and forgiveness of sins which should be the prerogative of the expected Messiah. "The lamb slain on the altar thus became the type of worship in the Jewish mind, the method of approach to God." †

\* Milman's *Christianity*, p. 76.

† Compare *Ecce Homo*, p. 12.



John's hearers probably did not understand, however, his evident reference in the use of this title to the prediction of Isaiah, thereby making Jesus to be the lamb of prophecy. Isa. liii, 7. In the writings of the old prophet John had already found a fitting title for himself with which to meet the captious questionings of the Pharisees; and now, as fully answering the requirements of his wonderful proclamation, he is prompted to borrow from the same source an appellation so exactly describing the character and mission of the man Jesus that the learning and piety of the Church will forever recognize the felicity of its choice.

While nearly all his countrymen were dreaming of national glory, and talking of war and conquest and kingly power and splendor as belonging to the advent of the Messiah, he saw that "the Lamb and not the Lion was to woo and win back the prodigal to the Father's bosom," and the words that he uttered gave fitting expression to his comprehension of the Father's infinite tenderness in stooping to embrace and lift up fallen humanity. John himself had known the torments of sin; he had witnessed its ravages in the nation he loved, and had traced its bitterness in the faces of all who came to hear his gospel of repentance; and when Jesus was revealed to him as the One anointed to expiate and to "take away sin," to "heal the broken-hearted and preach deliverance to the captives," his inmost soul rejoiced. Looking into

the future, he saw the spreading glory of the new kingdom which was to be set up in all lands. He saw the great army of souls rejoicing in God's emancipating love, and was humbly grateful that he had been called to herald such a mighty Gospel, although his mission was to be brief, and his career might end in persecution, and even a violent and untimely death.

Dr. Whedon says : "Strauss and others wonder how it is that John should understand the doctrine of the atonement, of which even the apostles at the time of Christ's resurrection had but little conception. Our reply is that John at this time was living in inspired communication from God, as is repeatedly declared. He understood it as Isaiah announced it centuries beforehand. We do not doubt that there were numbers of the more spiritual Jews who understood the prophetic and typical doctrines of the atonement ; but of all persons in the nation none should have a more clear view (even if it had to be obtained by immediate prophetic revelation) of the true nature of the Messiah's office than *he*, the harbinger himself. His clearness of view, in this the bright morning of his mission, may not only have been clearer than that of the apostles during the Saviour's sojourn, but clearer than even *he* possessed when in the day of darkness and trial he sent his message from prison to Jesus. Nor is it true that the Baptist is represented by our evangelist as expressing views of the dignity and

future history of Jesus in advance of any thing he is made to utter in the first three gospels. The Baptist is clearly made to declare that the personage whose forerunner he is is the Lord, that is, Jehovah, in Matt. iii, 3; he indicates the call of the Gentiles in Matt. iii, 9; he ascribes the sending of the Holy Ghost to Christ, Matt. iii, 11; and he pronounces Christ the judge and executor of final and eternal retribution in Matt. iii, 12. Our present evangelist is indeed, as he proposes to be, more diffuse and extended in representing the Baptist's testimony to the high personality of Jesus; but he is not more decisive. The Baptist's Christ is just as divine a being in the first evangelist as in the last.\*

John's assertion of Christ's character, in the words, "I saw, and bare record, that this is the *Son of God*," is capable of but one signification. We cannot justly put upon it any other meaning than that afforded by the ancient prophets who declared that the Messiah should be "God with us; the Lord our righteousness; the mighty God, the everlasting Father." Isa. vii, 14; ix, 6; Jer. xxiii, 6; Matt. i, 23.

The Baptist's second testimony to the character and mission of Jesus, given in the presence and hearing of the multitude, seems to have attracted but little attention; at least it was followed by no immediate outward and visible results. The revealed

\* Comment on John i, 29.

truth was so great, and accompanied by so little explanation, that the unexpected and really unprepared people did not comprehend it. Some curiosity may have been aroused as to one so beautiful in form and dignified in manner, about whom such strange things had been said by the eccentric preacher, but aside from that Jesus came and went, seemingly, as unnoticed as before. So John resolved on another mode of testimony.

The next day he was standing apart from the crowd in conversation with two of his most intelligent and devout disciples—John, afterward the evangelist, and Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter—when Jesus was seen walking a little distance from them, alone and in contemplative silence. In a most solemn and emphatic manner John fastened his penetrating eye upon the young Galilean, thereby directing the attention of the two disciples to him, and repeated a part of his declaration of the day before, “Behold the Lamb of God!” leaving their memory to supply the remainder of that startling and prophetic disclosure. This expression, “Lamb of God,” fastened itself in the mind and heart of the future evangelist, although he did not yet understand in what sense Jesus was that Lamb, or how by him man’s sin was to be taken away. He was familiar with the ceremonies of the great national fast-day, called the Day of Atonement, when expiation was made for the sins

of the nation. He had often seen the two lambs or kids brought to the temple, the one to be sacrificed upon the altar, and the other (after a piece of scarlet cloth, typical of the sins of the people, had been bound upon it) to be led off into the wilderness and set free; and he knew that the two goats typified the one glorious truth that the sins of the people were borne away and lost sight of forever.\* The connection, however, between this impressive scene and the Baptist's declaration concerning Christ he did not at once understand; but in after years, when long association with the Master had opened up to him the full meaning of that wonderful appellation, it became the favorite and oft-repeated title by which in his written Gospel he loved to refer to our Lord.

This third explicit testimony of the Baptist to Jesus was so effective that it cost him two of his most valued disciples, and was the occasion for the first fulfillment of his own prophetic words as to the relative importance of his own and the Messiah's missions, "He must increase, but I must decrease;" words which, referring, as they do, to John's suddenly waning prestige and untimely end, as well as the rising, spreading glory of the new kingdom, are as full of pathos as they are of promise.

\* Compare Lev. xvi with McClintock's and Strong's Bib. Cyc., art. "Atonement, Day of."



The religious feeling had been thoroughly aroused in John and Andrew by the preaching of the Baptist. Not only was the national expectation of the Messiah's kingdom quickened in them, not only had they intelligently received baptism as typifying a spiritual preparation for citizenship in that kingdom, but their hearts had been deeply moved. They were conscious of a painful sense of spiritual need. They longed for a guide, a teacher; one who could perfect the work which had been so well begun by the Baptist; and very naturally they began to hope that such a helper might be found in the one thus pointed out to them. So they followed him, and the Baptist did not forbid them. He may have been conscious of a feeling of regret that even his chief disciples should turn toward another; but he was too great and too loyal to make the least effort to restrain them. He knew that unconsciously they were putting themselves under a better, higher guidance than he could give. He was permitted to catch a glimpse, at least, of the end from the beginning, and his great soul was satisfied. He might soon disappear from the public sight, but his mission was not a failure. Henceforth his own name and brief work would be inseparably connected in men's thoughts with that of his Lord. So, not only was he willing, but glad, that these choice disciples, and others like unto them, should follow this

new Master, while he would still stand in his appointed place, abating not a jot of his fearless message, maintaining to the last his uncompromising integrity and his fiery, compelling eloquence.

Dr. Lange well says: "The greatness of the Baptist and the majesty of Christ appear in John's pointing his disciples to Christ, and Christ attaching the best of them immediately to himself. In these disciples of John the spiritual perfection of the work of the Baptist is seen.

## CHAPTER XX.

## INCREASING AND DECREASING.

“Where is the lore the Baptist taught,  
 The soul unswerving and the fearless tongue?  
 The much-enduring wisdom, sought  
 By lonely prayer the haunted rocks among?  
 Who counts it gain his light should wane,  
 So the whole world to Jesus throng.”

—CHRISTIAN YEAR.

AFTER his first passover and his night interview with Nicodemus our Lord left Jerusalem and started on a slow journey through Samaria into Galilee. Reaching a retired district of the country in north-eastern Judea, near the western bank of the Jordan, he tarried there for a month or two, and while he taught his disciples baptized the coming multitudes.

John also was preaching and baptizing near by, at Enon, a place where there were many springs and rivulets which, whatever the mode of baptism, would be very essential to the convenience and comfort of his numerous followers.\* Jesus and John said but little in reference to each other, but the few words

\* For full consideration of the various opinions of scholars as to the exact location of Enon see McClintock and Strong's *Biblical Cyclopedia*; Geikie's *Life of Christ*, vol. i, p. 512.

they did utter showed the highest mutual regard and the utmost congeniality of spirit. There was no conflict in their teachings and no rivalry in their baptisms. Both baptisms were initiatory; a ceremonial consecration and cleansing of the people in token of fitness for the new kingdom and the service of the new King. Having, therefore, the same object, there could certainly be no objection to their being continued together. The Jewish Church failed to profit by the solemn rite, as it had learned no lesson from the cleansing of the temple by Christ, which was an act of the same import; so in a short space of time both John and the disciples of Jesus ceased to baptize, and the ceremony was not renewed until after the ascension of Jesus, when it was extended to embrace the world of Christian believers, and perpetuated as the sacramental and ceremonial door into the Church, for Jew and Gentile alike—those who had received John's baptism of repentance as well as those who had not. Acts xix, 1-7. Thus far John, true to the position that had been assigned him, had continued the work begun under such auspicious circumstances, but which was soon to be terminated by his unjust imprisonment and cruel death. His followers were still numerous, and his disciples manifested a zeal most appropriate to their calling, which zeal, after their leader was removed, was to perpetuate their organization, through such as had not believed in Christ as the Messiah, until

long after Pentecost and the firm establishment of the Christian Church. Says Neander: "It does not militate at all against our position, in regard to the Baptist's recognition of Christ, that many of his disciples did not join the Saviour at a later period; and even that a sect was formed from them hostile to Christianity. We have already seen that it was necessary for John to maintain his independent sphere of labor, and that his position naturally led him to direct only the more susceptible of his disciples to Jesus, and that, too, by degrees. These latter were probably such as had imbibed more of John's longing desire for 'him that was to come' than of the austere and ascetic spirit of the sect. As to the rest, we have only to say that we have no right to judge the master by his scholars, or the scholars by their master. Men who hold a position preparatory and conducive to a higher one often retain the peculiar and one-sided views of their old ground, and are even driven into an attitude of opposition to the new and better. This seems to have been the case with John's disciples in relation to Christianity. It is a matter of *fact* that John openly recognized Jesus as the Messiah when he baptized him." \*

When it was noised abroad that Jesus was sojourning in this rural place the common people, who always heard him gladly, left Jerusalem, and the other cities and villages of that region, and came in great

\* *Life of Christ*, Book iii, chap. ii, sec. 41.



numbers to listen to his words, and to be baptized by his disciples. This new popular movement naturally aroused the opposition of the jealous Pharisees, and they immediately concocted a plan for breaking it up.

They again sent deputies to John's camp with instructions to sow the seeds of dissension between his disciples and those of Jesus, by raising the question of the relative value of the two baptisms. The Pharisees, referring to Christ's well-known miracles at the late passover, and also to the fact that his followers were now rapidly increasing in numbers, insisted upon it that the superiority was on Jesus's side. John's disciples, who were by no means as humble or as wise as their master, still contended that the priority of John's advent, together with the fact that he baptized and proclaimed Jesus, plainly gave him the pre-eminence. Zealous in their partisanship, and heated by the dispute, John's disciples at last came to him; and with the tone of men whose feelings have been hurt, and who have a just grievance, they said to him: "Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond [or east of] Jordan, to whom thou bearest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all men come to him." John iii, 22-36. Their phraseology indicated their belief in Jesus's inferiority; and, forgetting how emphatic was John's testimony to the kingship of Jesus, they still held their master as principal, and insisted that Jesus was simply with him. Their

mortification because of the cunning argument of the Pharisees, which had already set their minds against Jesus and his work, appeared also in their exaggerated language that all men were flocking to the new teacher. They had already heard John's testimony in Jesus's favor, but they evidently did not understand it fully. They had no desire to go beyond John's teachings, which were, as we have seen, only preliminary in their character; and they naturally thought it unreasonable that Jesus, who owed his very first disciples to John's testimony and influence, should either exalt himself above the latter, or set up a rival camp in the immediate neighborhood.

John's reply to his querulous disciples revealed the real greatness of the man more clearly than any thing he had before said or done. "Do not wonder," he said, "at the growing influence of Jesus; for it is according to God's order. Neither he nor I can have any power for good except it be given us from heaven. I, as a herald, have faithfully delivered my message to men, and my mission is now well-nigh ended. The fact that men join themselves to my kinsman is one proof that God hath sent him, and that he is divinely inspired to give them something higher, and therefore more satisfactory, than I can bestow. I will not aspire above my appointed office. You can all bear me witness that I never announced myself as the Messiah, but only as his forerunner. I am

simply a herald sent before a superior. I have repeatedly declared to the people that I am only a *voice* proclaiming a *reality*; a sandal-bearer going before a Master so transcendently my superior that I am not worthy to unloose his shoe-latchets; a mere outpurer of water foreshadowing the great outpurer of the Spirit, who is, therefore, God. And mark you, while to your minds there may be something humiliating in my present position, to me there is a compensation of the most exquisite joy. My work is about ended; the goal of my brightest hopes is reached at last. As the chosen and chief friend of the Bridegroom—the Messiah—I have led to him the Bride—the Theocratic Congregation—and I rejoice to see the Christ about to be married to his new Church. I have been permitted to stir up the multitude to flock to the ministration of this Mightier One; the divine will is being accomplished, the divine order is being observed, and I can only be thankful and happy. He must increase, but I must decrease.” Thus spoke the foremost man in all the land, showing forth his “splendid humility” and his sublime faith in God.

Neander declares that “the great, the Godlike feature of John’s character was his thorough understanding of himself and his calling.” He was content to recede from the public sight while still in the prime of manhood, for he knew that his mission was fulfilled. In the establishment of the new kingdom

of heaven he had been honored with a divine commission, and he had no thought of even attempting to go beyond its limitations. John was but a man, with all the common infirmities of our nature ; and it must have been a severe trial for him to know that by his side, in the region where he had enjoyed the most unexampled popularity, another had risen up whose success so far outstripped his own as to throw it entirely into the shade. From the very moment when he had baptized Jesus, and publicly attested his Messiahship, the popular favor had been gradually withdrawn from himself to be bestowed, with an increasing acclaim, upon this new Rabbi. But John was, indeed, one of the greatest of men. He had been fitted for this heavy burden, and he bore it not only without a murmur, but with an air of positive triumph. His serene patience was all the more beautiful as a characteristic of one so full of masculine energy, of such indomitable will, and noted for the exhibition of such strong passions. His fraternal love and loyalty to Christ was like unto that of Jonathan for David, and could spring only from the perfect harmony between his soul and the divine purpose.

In John's remaining words to his disciples he bears his final testimony to the character and office of Christ ; going much beyond what he had said before, confirming in the most emphatic and unmistakable language all that Christ before or afterward claimed

for himself. In words of wondrous sublimity, revealing the tender adoration of his faithful heart, he concluded his testimony—a testimony that will ever be treasured by the Christian Church.

“He that cometh from above is above all: he that is of the earth is earthy, and speaketh of the earth: he that cometh from heaven is above all. And what he hath seen and heard, that he testifieth; and no man receiveth his testimony. He that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true. For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him. The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand. He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.”

Such was John's bearing and such his speech on being told of the growing popularity of Jesus and the throngs which gathered around him and his disciples. But among the chief Jews at Jerusalem, who from the very beginning opposed Christ with a vehemence born of bigotry and hypocrisy, the news produced a very different effect from that intended, increasing their rage and intensifying their hate, until, as a result, a storm burst over the head of Jesus which compelled him (since the hour for his sacrifice had not yet come) to retreat, with his immediate attendants, into Galilee.



John faithfully continued his work for a short time longer, and, although the rulers and the great men of the nation deserted him, from political motives, still with all classes of the common people he was very popular. They still regarded him as a prophet sent from God, and so strongly were they attached to him that the rulers, for a time at least, dared not molest him, though they were bent on putting him out of their way the moment a favorable opportunity should present itself.

## CHAPTER XXI.

## THE ARREST.

HEROD ANTIPAS—whom Canon Farrar pronounces the pettiest, meanest, weakest, and most contemptible of titular princelings—was at this time tetrarch of Galilee and Perea. He was a son of Herod the Great by Malthace, a Samaritan woman. The Herods were of Idumean descent, but were Jews in faith, and as a family evidently cherished a desire to found a great and independent Jewish kingdom which should even rival the glory of Solomon's reign. The building of many fine cities and towns, the systematic strengthening of the national government and influence, and especially the rebuilding of the temple at Jerusalem, were all parts of this family scheme. The protection of Rome was at first a necessity, and the successive princes of this great family were sufficiently crafty to court imperial favor, often with weak servility and a most suspicious show of humility; but the design of Herod I. and Agrippa I., as well as the most prominent and powerful of those who came after them, plainly was to found an independent eastern empire.

Herod the Great, who was king of all Palestine, at

his death, according to the custom of the times, divided his kingdom between his three sons, which act was ratified by the imperial government. Archelaus was made tetrarch of Judea, Samaria, and Idumea; Philip, of Trachonitis and Iturea; and Herod Antipas, of Galilee and Perea. The latter prince was a true Herod, so far as his ambition and vast plans for personal aggrandizement were concerned, but, unlike his father, he was cowardly, shortsighted, and often showed himself weak in some great emergency when, of all times, he ought to have been strong. He was given to sensuality and voluptuous living, and was apt to be influenced in his public as well as private acts by his favorites, and that usually to his own hurt and the detriment of his kingdom. He had a passion for building fine palaces and castles, as well as enlarging and beautifying the chief cities of his realm. His most important enterprise in this direction was the building of the city of Tiberias on the Sea of Galilee, which he made his capital, giving it the name of the reigning Roman emperor, with whom he was a great favorite. Antipas had first married an Arabian princess, the daughter of Aretas, king of Petra, by which alliance he no doubt sought to strengthen himself in the East in harmony with the ambitious designs of his family. Some years after he entered upon a second matrimonial venture, a somewhat detailed account of which is not only essential to the completeness of our narrative, but will

also illustrate the social life and some of the general characteristics of the age.

Herodias was the daughter of Aristobulus, one of the accomplished sons of Herod the Great and Mariamne, and, consequently, sister of King Agrippa I. On her grandmother's side she belonged to the noble line of Asinonean princes, and is said to have possessed the beauty and many of the accomplishments of the celebrated though unfortunate Mariamne, with but few of her virtues. On the death of her grandmother Herodias became the favorite of her grandfather Herod, whose name she bore and whom she closely resembled in many particulars, being ambitious, designing, heartless, unscrupulous, fearless, and bent on her own advancement at any cost. In compliance with the wishes of Herod the Great she married her uncle Herod Philip, who was heir-apparent to the throne, thereby gaining a position through which she had every prospect of eventually becoming queen of the Holy Land. But she was destined to be thwarted in her ambitious designs, for through the persistent intrigues for the succession, which made the closing years of King Herod's life intolerably wretched, her husband was disinherited and the kingdom divided between his three brothers, one of whom was also named Philip. Therefore, on the death of Herod the Great, Herodias and her husband were compelled to remove to Rome, where, beyond the reach of the jealous and royal brothers,

they lived as private citizens, but in the enjoyment of considerable wealth and the prestige of a notorious and influential, if not honorable, family name. This sort of life proved more acceptable to Philip than that he had led at his father's court, and he settled down to the full enjoyment of it, utterly refusing to engage in the ambitious intrigues for a throne to which his discontented wife was constantly urging him. Herodias, however, was determined to be a queen at any cost, and, since she could not persuade her tame-spirited husband through war or criminal intrigue to grasp a crown, she secretly determined to secure another and more congenial spouse who was already crowned. Fortune seemed to favor her base schemes, for just at the right moment Antipas came to Rome, where, of course, he was entertained by his brother Philip. Herodias saw her opportunity, and was neither slow nor scrupulous in improving it. She at once employed all the charms of her great beauty and wit, as well as all the power of her indomitable will, to captivate the tetrarch, and, as might be expected when we consider the character of the man, she completely succeeded. Antipas conceived a passion for the charming but wicked woman which was as near genuine love as any sentiment of which he was capable, and which remained unchanged to the end of life. Regardless of conscience, self-respect, or the Roman and Jewish law in the case, the two entered into a marriage contract, by the terms of



which Herodias consented to abandon her lawful husband, Philip, and with her daughter Salome accompany Antipas into Galilee, he agreeing, on their arrival there, to divorce his wife, the daughter of Aretas, and elevate his new love to the place of the deposed princess. Philip seems to have quietly acquiesced in the arrangement, as though he were glad to be rid of such a wife, and believed that in any event his rash brother would finally get the worst of the bargain.

All this, though characteristic of life among the princes and nobles of the day, was especially contrary to Jewish law, and when the guilty pair arrived at the royal palace at Tiberias, and began the marriage ceremonies and feastings, by which they expressed their utter disregard of either the sentiments of the people or the sacred law of the land, the indignation of the entire nation was aroused, and every Galilean citizen seemed to share in spirit the disgrace which had fallen upon his prince. The daughter of Aretas, who had heard of her faithless husband's design before his return from Rome, and whose high spirit could not brook such an insult to her person and her royal lineage, had, in the meantime, taken the matter of divorce into her own hands, and gathering up her personal effects, and summoning her loyal personal attendants, had departed (by Herod's permission, who thought that his wife had not perceived any thing, and was simply desirous of a change of

air and scenery) to the castle of Machærus, which was temporarily subject to her father. When all necessary preparations had been made by the generals of Aretas's army, she was rapidly conveyed to her father's court in Arabia.\* Aretas at once declared war upon Antipas, and gathered a large and enthusiastic army to avenge his daughter's wrongs, while all Galilee and Perea, with but little love for their weak and wicked tetrarch, and thoroughly ashamed of their national cause, were yet compelled to rally to the defense of a leader who they knew merited the chastisement that was threatened. These soldiers of Herod's were stationed in great numbers east of the Jordan, to check all Bedouin lawlessness, and in preparation to meet the army of Aretas; and some of them were daily seen coming and going in the Baptist's camp to consult this new Elijah, if perchance they may gain some heart of hope for their dangerous and altogether unwelcome enterprise. The politicians, too, are there, intent on watching the preacher who has such strange influence with the people, and to find out, if possible, before it is too late, whether the mass-meeting is favorable to Herod or is secretly in the interests of the Arab.

John really cared little about the outcome of this great war between the crafty Bedouin and the unprincipled tetrarch, but, like his courageous prototype, Elijah, he did not hesitate to denounce wickedness in

\* Josephus, *Antiq.*, xviii, 5, 1.

the very highest places. Knowing that the characters and acts of the Herods were constantly bringing them into conflict with the Jewish law, to the grief and scandal of all pious citizens, he had not been slow to expose their selfish ambition, or to prophesy evil to the land if these rulers persisted in their stubborn disregard of the divine commands. This having occurred in the territory of Antipas, the jealousy of that Oriental despot was aroused. A man who could call together and control such multitudes as John did, and who was so utterly fearless in his denunciations of all wrong, could not, in the estimation of a prince like Herod, be a safe leader, and must not be left to himself. The tetrarch's suspicious eye was, therefore, upon him; and it only needed one act of fidelity to the truth, as against the profligate life of the court, to bring down upon him the tyrant's vengeance. The inevitable collision between the haughty ruler and the indomitable prophet soon came. Neither would yield his ground; and the struggle finally ended in one of the darkest tragedies of those tragic times.

Herod and his voluptuous court, probably, came into John's neighborhood to occupy for a season one of the sumptuous palaces which the wealthy prince delighted to build; and the presence of royalty not only aroused the curiosity of the people, but gave a suitable opportunity for John to vent his righteous indignation, and to free his conscience as a faithful

promoter of righteousness. John felt that he had a political as well as a religious duty to perform, and he unsparingly censured the tetrarch and his ambitious paramour; declared that God's curse would rest upon the incestuous marriage which had dishonored the court and the nation, and that the unholy war to which the people had been summoned could only end in calamity, as had all such national struggles when God was not the leader. His fiery words increased the discontent of the people, who were restive under the rigorous rule of Herod, and were ripe for insurrection, until, at last, their murmurings swelled into the roar of threatening complaint and reached the ears of their royal master. With all his insolence and tyranny Antipas was a coward, and feared the people. Knowing their enthusiastic attachment to the eloquent preacher, he dared not wreak summary vengeance upon him. With a politic show of courteous condescension, therefore, he summoned John to his presence as though he were himself an inquirer for the truth, or was curious to hear with his own ears a specimen of the famous preacher's eloquence. John came, but it was as Nathan came to David, or Elijah came to the iniquitous Ahab and Jezebel. The Baptist was no courtier. He was not accustomed to the soft raiment or the soft speech of king's houses. He was utterly devoid of policy, and his diplomacy consisted only of the most incorruptible fidelity to the right. He knew not how to frame his words to prophesy only harsh

things for the unrepentant people, and smooth things for their hard-hearted lord. He was absolutely incapable of making the nice distinctions which even good men sometimes make between the sins of a prince and the sins of a pauper. So he spoke to Herod as he would have spoken to any common man.

The coming of John the Baptist, the personification of the inflexible Mosaic law, before Antipas, the typical hypocrite, time-server, and law-breaker of the day, was an event which must inevitably hold a conspicuous place in historic records; a scene which has often inspired the pencil of the painter and the pen of the poet; an exhibition of the absolute fearlessness of innocence and integrity, even when confronted by unscrupulous and unlimited earthly power, that rises at once into the region of the sublime. Clothed in his desert raiment of hair-cloth, with the simple leathern girdle about his loins, John was in striking contrast to the perfumed and bejeweled courtiers who crowded about the throne to see and to hear this new wonder. But the fierce Nazarite took no note of this. Fastening his eagle eye upon the incestuous Herod, with a look that made the guilty monarch quail as though the very sword of divine justice had flashed before him, he reasoned about righteousness, temperance, and the judgment to come, in words which "fell like flakes of fire upon the hard and icy conscience of his royal listener." He



pronounced the curse of the Mosaic law upon Herod's unhallowed union; and, calling upon him to dismiss the imperious woman who had brought disgrace to her royal lover and evil to the land, he reached the climax of his personal indignation and his faithful speech in those memorable words of rebuke, denunciation, and warning: "It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife!" Matt. xiv, 3-5; Luke iii, 19.

John's demeanor was so bold, and his words so fraught with authority, that Herod seemed, for the time being, conscience-smitten and expectant. But so completely had he come under the control of Herodias, who clung to him like an evil spirit, that it seemed impossible for him to master his guilty love and put himself right before the nation and the God whom he, at times at least, professed to zealously serve. John, however, was permitted to depart in peace, but probably not without a caution and a threat touching his future attitude toward the tetrarch, neither of which had any influence upon the conduct of a prophet who was especially commissioned to reprove sin wherever found, and whose whole soul was set on obeying God rather than man.

Soon after the event we have just described Antipas prepared to march against his quondam father-in-law, the Arabian emir. But learning of John's increasing popularity, and the excitement of the

people who rallied around him, and fearing that John might turn his wide influence to political account and head some religious rising like that of Judas the Galilean, he dared not leave behind him one who seemed so likely to disturb the quiet of his kingdom during his absence. He held it, therefore, better to anticipate any attempt at revolution by imprisoning him, and, if needs were, by putting him to death, rather than lament a disturbance after it had broken out. So, braving the anger of the people as the lesser of two evils, the tyrant sent a band of soldiers to John's camp, probably at night, when the people were slumbering, and seizing the defenseless prophet they quickly marched him southward along the eastern side of Jordan and the Dead Sea, a distance of from twelve to fourteen hours, to the noted fortress of Machærus, which was now again under Herod's control, where he was imprisoned to await the pleasure of his royal enemy when the crisis of war should have passed.\*

According to the most reliable chronology, John's arrest occurred in the spring of A. U. C. 780. The war with Aretas proved more serious than Herod had anticipated. The emir's army was inspired by a genuine spirit of vengeance, which is a most powerful motive in the breast of the hot-blooded Oriental, while the soldiers of Herod were alike ashamed of their leader and their cause, and, consequently, had

\* Josephus, *Antiq.*, xviii, 5, 2.

little spirit or hope of success. The very first battle resulted in a severe and ruinous defeat for the Galileans, and Herod was only saved from utter subjugation and dethronement by the command of the Roman emperor to Aretas that he should desist, and withdraw his troops into his own country. A message from the master of the world could not be safely disregarded; so Aretas, for the time being, called off the dogs of war, and the justly discomfited Herod was permitted to return again to his life of selfish luxury and the enjoyment of his unholy love.

## CHAPTER XXII.

## THE IMPRISONMENT.

WHILE the war between Herod and Aretas was in progress John remained a prisoner at Machærus. The free life he had led in the wilderness and along the Jordan had poorly fitted him for the confinement to which he was now subjected. It was like caging the eagle or chaining the lion. But he was great enough, and, no doubt, strong enough to control his impatience; and we know not what precious lessons he received from the Divine One whose commission he bore, softening and perfecting his character for the further testimony he was to bear to the truth, and the glorious entrance he was to gain, through the door of martyrdom, into the rest of the faithful and the joy of the Lord.

Dr. Geikie (quoting from Josephus, Seetzen, Tristram, *et al.*) gives the following description of the fortress of Machærus and the region around it:

“This castle, known as ‘the diadem,’ from its crown-like seat on the lofty rocks, and as the ‘black tower,’ lay on the east side of the Dead Sea, almost on a line with Bethlehem. It was ‘the southern stronghold of Perea, as the Macedonian colony of

Pella was the northern. Nature herself had here raised a stronghold, as she had that of Masada, on the other side of the Dead Sea, a little farther south. It lay above the deep gorge that divides the mountains of Abarim from the range of Pisgah, in the wild region where, from immemorial tradition, the Jews sought the grave of Moses. A few miles to the north, in a deep, rugged valley, lay Callirrhœ, famous for its warm baths, where the dying Herod had sought relief, and had nearly met his death. Its hot springs burst at one spot from the rocks in the bottom of the gorge, and near them others poured forth water of the iciest coldness; while the hills around were in those days pierced with mines of sulphur and alum. The torrent of Zerka Ma'in, descending between walls of basalt, and red, brown, and black volcanic tuff, rushes through the ravine, over a channel of huge rocks, from the uplands of Perea to the east shore of the Dead Sea. At a short distance south the Wady Z'gara runs east and west, in a profound gorge, with precipitous sides, at some parts eight hundred feet high, cleaving its wild way, by leaps, down three thousand eight hundred feet, to the Dead Sea. A parallel valley succeeds, along the hollow of which ran the old Roman road, joining Machærus with Callirrhœ, and with the great road from Petra to Damascus. Rising from this ravine, the long mountain ridge of Attaroth stretches, in heaped-up confusion, ten miles to the south-west, and on the



highest point of this, where it sinks sheer down toward the Zerka Ma'in, the ruins of Machærus, in great masses of squared stone, still overhang the profound depth below. At the foot of the isolated cliff on which the fortress was built, and separated from it by a deep and narrow valley, not quite a mile across, lie the ruins of the town of Machærus, covering more than a square mile, showing in the remains of a Temple of the Sun that, along with the fanatical Jewish population, it must have had many heathen, that is, Greek or Roman citizens, who were allowed to practice their idolatry in peace. The first fortress had been built here by Alexander Jannæus, but it was afterward destroyed by Gabinius, in his war against Aristobulus. When Herod came to be king, however, his keen eye saw the strength of the position, and he determined to rebuild the castle as a frontier defense against the Arabs. Surrounding a large space with walls and towers, he built a city from which a path led up to the citadel on the top of the ridge. The citadel itself was at one end of a narrow ridge, nearly a mile in length from east to west, and formed a last retreat in case of attack, but it was not enough for his magnificent ideas.

“At the other end of the ridge he built a great wall, inclosing the summit of the hill, with towers two hundred feet high at the corners, and in the space thus gained built a grand palace, with rows of columns of a single stone apiece, halls lined with many-

colored marbles, magnificent baths, and all the details of Roman luxury, not omitting huge cisterns, barracks, and store-houses, with every thing needed for defense in case of siege. The detached citadel was the scene of John's imprisonment: a stern and gloomy keep, with underground dungeons, still visible, hewn down into the living rock. The fortress-palace, at the other end of the fortifications, at the time of the residence of Antipas and his retainers, was merry with their revelry, but the dungeon of John lay in midnight darkness. From his windows Antipas had a magnificent view of the Dead Sea, the whole course of the Jordan, Jerusalem, Hebron, the frowning fortress of Masada, the circle of Jordan, and the cliffs of Engedi, on the west, and of the mountains of Gilead, rising beyond the wild heights of Pisgah, on the north; but his captive, the child of the boundless wilderness, pined in perpetual night.

“Beneath this stronghold, perched on the top of the highest summit of the wild region, the valley sank in unscalable precipices, on three sides, to such a depth that Josephus is well-nigh excused for thinking that the eye could not reach their bottom. The fourth side was only a little less terrible. Wild desolation reigned far and near, but the hidden hollows of some of the gorges were luxuriant with palms, olives, and vines; and superstition believed that, among other wonders, there grew in them a plant, fiery red in color, and shedding rays of flame in the evening,

which had power to expel demons and heal diseases, though only to be pulled at the cost of life. Seetzen, a German traveler, who rediscovered the site in 1807, has left a vivid picture of the landscape around. Masses of lava, brown, red, and black, are varied with pumice-stone, or black basalt, in huge broken masses or perpendicular cliffs, resting on white limestone. The rushing stream beneath is overgrown with oleanders and date-palms, willows, poplars, and tall reeds, while hot sulphur springs gush from the clefts of the rocks, sending up a thick mist of steam.

“ In this wild, warlike place lay John, cut off from the world, from Israel, and from the grand work of national regeneration of which he was the soul—in the midst of a population of soldiers, barbarians, Arabs, Idumeans, Amorites, and Moabites, who ran no risk of being infected by his words. Perhaps he was favored beyond other prisoners by being brought from his underground vault, after a time, to some cell of the corner towers, to be near his captor. If so, he could look from his lonely height over the regions of the Dead Sea and the Jordan, where the years of his desert consecration and the months of his great work had been spent. Yet he was no mere shadow of the past, but still a living power. No strong hand had protected him ; no miracle had been vouchsafed by God for his deliverance, and there was no hope of a rescue by the people, however they might regret him or murmur at his fate. His prison, unapproach-

able on three sides, and reached on the fourth only by a bridle path, through numerous fortified gates, made escape impossible. Nor could he hope to have support from any within the castle itself, for its motley population of Arabs, Edomites, and Moabites cared nothing for the promises of Israel. The sheiks of the wandering tribes around went out and in, the troops of the garrison were reviewed and drilled, or lounged around the battlements, and the courtiers of the haughty Herodias flashed hither and thither in their bravery through the town; the hot springs of the valley and the bracing air of the mountain-top gave new tone to the nerves of the health-seekers frequenting them from all parts; but the Baptist lay unheeded and helpless. Apart from political reasons, it was so healthy a place that Antipas might well be fond of it. Josephus says that provisions remained good for a hundred years in the fortress of Masada, on the other side of the Dead Sea, for the air, at the great height of the castle, is purified from every earthly or hurtful exhalation. Yet there was no great bustle, for the place was too out of the way for much intercourse with it. Ten thousand people lived in the town below, but round John were only rough soldiery, drafted from the neighboring tribes, and the attendants on Herod, of whom Jesus speaks as 'the people gorgeously appareled, who lived delicately,' as become those in the courts of kings. Yet the nation, with unbroken faith, kept watch outside

the gates of the prison, and the breath of God still moved among them like the soft winds through the leaves of summer.”\*

Matthew, particularly, tells us that Herod desired to put John to death, but was restrained, for a time at least, because he feared the people, who counted John as a prophet, would rise in rebellion against his authority. Matt. xiv, 5. A like dread afterward prompted the rulers of the Jews to permit Jesus himself to come and go unnoledsted, although their hearts were set on ultimate vengeance against the man who dare denounce their hypocrisy to their faces.

In the meantime John's sufferings were keen and constant, for an eastern dungeon, especially in those days, was an unmitigated horror. Christ's words concerning John's treatment by his enemies (Matt. xvii, 12), "They did to him whatsoever they pleased," are sadly significant, and more than hint at insult, neglect, and even capricious torture. The opportunity to avenge themselves for John's plain speech and unsparing condemnation of their wicked ways was too favorable to be lost by Herod's courtiers. Mark adds still further to our knowledge of Herod's motives by showing that it was Herodias who constantly urged the tetrarch to put John to death, while his high esteem for the prophet's character as constantly prompted him to spare his life. Mark vi, 19, 20.

\* *Life of Christ*, vol. i, pp. 417-420.



After his war with Aretas, Antipas seems to have spent considerable time with his court at Machærus, where, like Felix, who so often listened to the reasonings of the prisoner Paul, he frequently commanded John to be brought into his presence, sometimes, no doubt, for the amusement of the crowd at his table, but oftener that he might listen to the preacher's eloquent declarations and arguments touching the kingdom of heaven. He knew John was a righteous man, and with all his arrogant pride he had occasional spasms of religious feeling, and as a Jew was for the time being interested in the religious ideas which had sprung up with the preaching of John, and were producing such an excitement, not only in his own dominions, but throughout those of his royal neighbors. Perhaps Herod wished to know what he must do to secure an interest in what the people regarded as the approaching political kingdom of God, in which Jewish influence and power should once more predominate. But whatever may have been the tetrarch's motive, or the hope of amusement on the part of Herodias and the throng of profligate courtiers, as often as John was led through those gorgeous halls, pale and wasted by long confinement and disappointed expectation, he hurled a shaft directly at the tyrant's conscience, and brought terror to the hearts of his favorites, by denouncing the great sin which was crying against them to heaven in the words—more and more terrible

coming from such a man in such a place: "It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife." It was the old struggle between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan, and God's appointed champion never lacked in either skill, patience, or courage. Again and again was he remanded to his dungeon, each time expecting that the command for his execution would soon follow him, but never once did his great soul tremble, never once did he fail of that serene peace which came from a consciousness of the divine companionship and favor.

Jesus, who was working miracles here and there, seemed to have forgotten his herald, but John's faith in the new King and his kingdom never wavered. The truth was marching on. God's purposes were fast being accomplished, and, though a prisoner and inactive, he was content. With all his faults, Herod knew how to distinguish and value manliness of head and heart; a man with clear sense enough to see the truth, though he was too irresolute to follow it. He knew well enough that John's way was the best and the safest in the end, but it was in conflict with his own selfish will, and he would not yield. Therefore, while Herod at times actually feared this just man and at other times heard him gladly, and conversed with him, and did many things under the influence of his fervent exhortations and councils, there was one thing he would not do. He

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stubbornly refused to repent of his sin and put away the partner of his unchaste love. Hence every conference ended, as it inevitably must, with the voice of God's fearless, unrelenting messenger sounding in the ears of the flushed and angry ruler: "It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife." Mark vi, 18.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

## JOHN'S MESSENGERS TO JESUS.

ALTHOUGH John was a prisoner his ministry had by no means ended. Besides his repeated testimony to the truth before Herod and his court he evidently had a more or less constant access to certain of his followers who lent more willing ears to his instructions. He even had considerable communication, through his trusty messengers, with the outside world. Matt. ix, 14; xi, 2; xiv, 12. It seems probable that, like Paul at Cesarea, he was at times allowed a certain degree of liberty, and his friends were permitted to minister to his wants. After his imprisonment his disciples still clung together, and some of them continued to preach a coming kingdom; but, lacking the inspiration and corrective influence of their master's presence, they made too much of externals, and therefore missed the higher spiritual life into which he would have led them. They even rivaled the Pharisees in their washings and fastings, were known as the most rigid ascetics in their habits and observances, and went about with heavy hearts and sad countenances because their loved teacher had been taken from them. Matt. ix, 14, 15. By degrees the crowd drew away from

them and sought a more winsome gospel with the vast congregation which listened to the words and witnessed the miracles of Jesus. But those disciples who had been the most strongly attached to John did not join themselves to the new teacher, although they had some communication with him, and, indirectly at least, made bold to criticise the cheerful and social manner of life which he encouraged in his disciples. They evidently regarded the mission of John's kinsman as still, in some sense, auxiliary to their own.

These disciples frequently visited John at Machærus, and brought him news as to what was going on at Jerusalem and elsewhere ; for those were exciting times, and they found in their master an eager listener. Particularly was he interested in what they told him of Jesus's marvelous works and growing popularity, and his preaching of the kingdom, which had begun in Galilee. John and his disciples were Jews, and the teachings of Jesus must have seemed to them, at least to some extent, of doubtful tendency. Jesus and his disciples did not fast ; they ignored many of the observances practiced by strict Jews, and they constantly objected to the accepted interpretation of the law and the prophets, while they as constantly arrayed themselves against some of the most cherished customs and prejudices of the people. John's disciples, if not also their master, must have shared more or less in the general belief that, while



the Messiah's kingdom was to be pure and holy, it was to be built up on the foundation of an earthly dominion. Among its chief characteristics were to be the political supremacy of Israel, with the overthrow of all oppressors and rivals; and probably John had persuaded himself that his royal Master, coming speedily into his kingdom, would bring about the instant release of his faithful and uncomplaining herald. Yet, so far as Jesus was concerned, there was apparently no preparation for such a Jewish triumph. He had not even assumed openly the office of Messiah, nor given the faintest intimation that he proposed to set up a purified theocracy. The kingdom of God had really come, but John and his disciples seemed to have failed to quite an extent in their comprehension of it. The King was characterized by no ascetic rigor; he dealt sparingly in denunciations of iniquity; he was shockingly liberal upon all social and religious subjects, and made sad havoc among the settled notions of men. He proclaimed a gentle Gospel, a Gospel of love and mercy, and seemed to make little distinction, so far at least as his ministry was concerned, between strict and apostate Jews, or even between Jews and Gentiles. He received sinners into his presence—seemed at times to actually prefer their company—and frequently sat down to eat with them. He sometimes showed marked favor to certain of the hated Romans, as in the case of the centurion at Capernaum (Matt. viii, 5-10), and more

than once had preferred the company and grateful love of veritable outcasts to the society and approval of the most learned doctors and teachers of the law. He had so far forgotten his dignity and his nationality as to teach for two days a crowd of unclean and outlawed Samaritans at the well and in the market-places of their chief city. John iv. He had accepted many an invitation to dine and lodge with publicans, and at last had called one of that despised class of renegade Jews to be an apostle. Matt. ix, 9-13.

To us, studying the life and character of Jesus of Nazareth from our distant and more elevated standpoint, all these things are among the clear proofs of his Messiahship, but to the imprisoned John and his disciples they were far otherwise. To these men, who still clung to the creed and practices, and many of the prejudices as well, of their nation, and expected the Messiah's kingdom to be a Jewish kingdom, in harmony with Jewish law and custom—a temporal as well as a spiritual kingdom—there were very many things about the new ministry in Galilee that were grievous stumbling-blocks to their faith.

Besides these strange things that were done there were many expected things that were not done. Herod still sat secure and triumphant upon his throne. Rome was as powerful and tyrannical as ever. An infidel Sadducee still profaned the sacred office of high-priest. The Pharisees daily grew more haughty and insolent. There were no signs of decreasing vi-

tality or power in the kingdom of this world, and, what was more disappointing, there were but few evidences that the kingdom of heaven was growing either in extent or influence. Even the King whom John had introduced to the nation made no effort to possess his crown, contenting himself with preaching to a miscellaneous crowd of followers the kingdom which, if indeed the Messiah, he ought to at once establish.

The situation was, indeed, very disappointing, and as the months followed each other until a whole year had passed it is no wonder if John grew anxious and at times impatient. The Baptist at Machærus at once reminds us of Elijah in the wilderness when he lay down beneath the juniper-tree, and at Horeb, when, in the solitude of the cave, he poured into the listening ear of Jehovah his complaint. John and his prototype were alike unable to fall in with the divine arrangement of events. Both were overwhelmed by the burden of a terrible though glorious mission.

There is no evidence that John actually doubted either that the kingdom was near or that his cousin was its anointed Founder and King. But, unquestionably, he was at times justly and sorely perplexed, since every thing was so contrary to his expectations and his own situation was so depressing, if not hopeless.

“ A child of the desert, accustomed to its wild free-

dom, he was now caged in a dismal fortress, with no outlook except black lava-crags and deep gorges yawning in seemingly bottomless depths. Burning with zeal, he found himself set aside as if forgotten of God, or of no use in his kingdom. Even the people seem to have forgotten him. His work seems to have been without results—a momentary excitement which had already died away. He could not hope for visits from Jesus, which could only have given a second prisoner to Machærus—‘the Black Castle.’ The reaction from the sense of boundless liberty in the desert to the forced inaction and close walls of a prison, and from the stir and enthusiasm of the great assemblies at the fords of the Jordan, affected even the strong and firm soul of the hero, as similar influences have affected even the bravest hearts since his day. Moses and Elijah had had their times of profound despondency, and it was no wonder that a passing cloud threw its shadow even over the Baptist.”\*

It would not be just for us to suppose for an instant that John’s interest in Jesus and his work had begun to subside, and he had withdrawn himself into a narrow life of mere selfish sorrow. No, he was too great a man, too true a man, for that. In the course he now adopted he only sought to have the things he did not understand explained by the only one who could explain them; one in whom he had the fullest

\* Geikie’s *Life of Christ*, vol. ii, p. 114.

confidence, and whose answer would be accepted as the final and satisfactory word. "The doubts in John's mind were not such as tended in the slightest degree to invalidate his previous testimonies to Jesus, or the evidence on which they rested. John's misgivings were not in their nature *skeptical*, but *anxious*. He doubted not the divinity of Jesus, but queried what was to be his future course. Like others, he expected a more rapid development of the Messiah's kingship; and as Jesus seemed to be permanently a peaceful prophet, he questioned whether a different royal Messiah was not yet to appear. The very fact that he sent to Jesus himself for relief, as the fountain and oracle of truth, shows that he still acknowledged him as one the latchet of whose shoes he was unworthy to unloose." \* Struggling with the powers of evil himself, he wanted to know from the commander of Jehovah's army how the battle was going in the world without; a prisoner and in bonds, he was anxious to learn if there was any hope for the millions of his countrymen who were not only captives to Rome, but bound by the stronger and more galling chains of bigotry and sin. He wanted to know if "the acceptable year of the Lord" had not now at last come, when liberty should be proclaimed by one whose word was law and whose power was irresistible. His own burdens he would bear with uncomplaining fortitude, but how about the grievous

\* Whedon on Matt. xi, 2.



and multiplied burdens borne by his countrymen, whose true welfare was dearer to him than even personal ease, or life itself?

Alongside of his own perplexities were the skepticisms of his disciples, who daily poured their doubts of Jesus's Messiahship into his ear, and insisted upon his either clearing them away or admitting their validity. At last, to satisfy himself and them, he chose two of his most trusty disciples, and sent them to Galilee, with instructions to ask Jesus this one simple question: "Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?" believing that in the answer to the query they would be fully instructed as to the character of Jesus from his own authoritative lips. Matt. xi, 2-6. It is probable that Dr. Whedon is right when he says: "The import of John's message was: 'I acknowledge thee as profoundly as ever as the Son of God, the way, the truth, and the life, whose unworthy harbinger and messenger I am. But thy present acts and words indicate that thou art to be a teacher and worker of miracles. Art thou also the predicted King of the glorious divine reign about to come in, or must we wait for another?' John, then, did not retract or doubt the past; he only queried the future. He seems to be running into the same train of reasoning as that which induced the later Jews to adopt the theory of the two Messiahs, one of whom (called by them the Son of Joseph, should fulfill the *humiliations* described by the prophets as be-

longing to the Messiah; and the other (whom they called the Son of David) should fulfill the glorious part of the prophecies. I do not mean that John adopted or was acquainted with this Jewish *theory*; but that the same *idea* (namely, the *contrast* lying between the humble, suffering Messiah and the glorious Messiah, Prince of the kingdom of God) which prompted that *theory* prompted his question." In formulating his question John undoubtedly had reference to the passage in Malachi, "Jehovah, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple" (Mal. iii, 1), thereby more than intimating that the slowness of Jesus to assert his rightful authority did not seem, at least, to agree with the well-known prediction.

The two disciples found Jesus at the height of his prosperity; in most striking contrast with the desolate plight of their Master, who was as one cast aside and forgotten by the fickle multitude. Their faithful hearts were made still heavier, and unquestionably their doubts were increased by what they at first saw; but they promptly delivered to Jesus the message with which they had been intrusted. Jesus gave them no direct reply. He did not say, "I am the Messiah." He manifested a reserve which seemed to blend the elements of truest modesty and firmest self-respect. He referred them to the promise of the ancient prophet as to the works of the Messiah: "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the

lame man leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert." Isa. xxxv, 5, 6. He then bade them take their places with his own disciples for a time, and note the fulfillment of the prediction.

Jesus had the highest respect for John, and rightly estimated his character and work, as is shown by the remarkable testimony which he afterward gave; but in this instance he treated John and his disciples as he would any other sincere questioners. From the very first he had endeavored to impress upon his disciples that his kingdom was to be a kingdom of equality, in which there was to be no favoritism, and he now took occasion to still further emphasize that fact by offering to these representatives of one of the greatest of men only the same evidences of his Messiahship which were given to the humblest Gentile who mingled with the expectant throng. But these evidences were enough to verify the sacred predictions, and John would have no difficulty in forming therefrom a correct and clear judgment as to the character and mission of Jesus.

Conspicuous among the followers of Christ there were always many who hoped that he would have pity upon them and heal their diseases. These he now summoned to his presence, and, having rebuked their infirmities, sent them away grateful and believing. He then said to the messengers, "Go and show John again those things which ye do hear and see:

the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the Gospel preached to them. And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me." Matt. xi, 4-6.

The crowning part of this testimony was the fact that the Gospel was preached to the poor, and special sympathy shown with the broken-hearted and oppressed. Nothing could more effectually touch the heart of John than this sublime reference to the words of the great Isaiah, who had, throughout his writings, so completely foreshadowed the Gospel. Isa. lxi, 1, 2. "Go and tell John these things," said Jesus. "Tell him, moreover, that I know how he is tempted; but let him comfort himself with the thought that he who holds fast his faith in spite of all fiery trials, and does not reject the kingdom of God because of its small beginnings and still, spiritual gentleness, so different from the worldly power and glory expected, already has the blessings it is sent to bring." \*

In all this Jesus showed the most profound knowledge of John's character, and, while he maintained fully his own self-respect he gave John the most complete proof that he had made no mistake in announcing him as the Messiah. "It was not in his intellectual discernment, but through his feelings, that John erred in regard to Jesus: he was 'offended' where,

\* Ewald, v, 431.

in analogous circumstances, Abraham, Moses, Elijah, Mary, and Peter stumbled. With divine gentleness Jesus corrected his mistake; and this correction served at the same time as his vindication before the people."\* From what we know of the character of Jesus, and especially his tender sympathy with all who were distressed, we may well suppose that, while his public answer to John was brief, he did not suffer the messengers to depart without many private words of love and encouragement for their master; words which, while they held out no hope of liberty, or even long-continued life, had still a divine power to strengthen the courage and perfect the patience of the prisoner, thus fitting him for the supreme trial he was so soon to meet. What was the precise effect of Christ's testimony, in public answer to the messengers, upon the mind of John we are not told. Death soon came to cut short all his perplexities, and to relieve him of all responsibility. "The untamable freedom of the recluse was to crown its restless and persecuted career by the only end that was worthy of it."†

\* Dr. Lange.

† Renan's *Life of Jesus*, 189.



## CHAPTER XXIV.

## CHRIST'S EULOGY OF JOHN.

SCARCELY had the messengers departed when, taking John for a text, Jesus's full heart broke forth into a most tender, lofty, and fervent eulogy upon his persecuted forerunner. From what they had just heard, the people were in some danger of misunderstanding John's character, and Jesus hastened to set them right.

Repeatedly had the Baptist borne public testimony to Jesus, and now, for the first time, at least at any length, Jesus gave expression to his mature estimate of the gifted preacher and his work, in words which, if long delayed, evidenced such tender sympathy, keen analysis, and authoritative declaration concerning the greatness of the man and his mission that if their import ever reached the ears of John he must have felt more than compensated for all his disappointment and suffering.

Our Lord rarely gave his opinion of an individual; dealing rather in those great principles which underlie all true character, or denouncing the evils which tend to destroy utterly God's image in man. But here (Matt. xi, 7-19), with a glad frankness and fullness, he gave us heaven's appraisal of a great

life, at the same time skillfully using that life as a reproof to his hearers for their false standards of character.

As if he had said, What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A man of vacillating purpose and timid soul, like the reeds which line the banks of the Jordan and bend before every breeze that passes by; a fickle, changeful man, swayed by the breath of self-interest; the sport of any and every outward influence? Such is not John's true character. He is, rather, like the rock upon which his gloomy prison is founded, forever fixed in his fidelity to the truth and the souls of men, fearing none but God. When you flocked to John's ministry did you expect to see a man clothed in soft raiment, as though the long-looked-for light and deliverance would come to Israel through the agency of the luxurious and pleasure-loving? I tell you such men are appropriately found in king's palaces; they love ease, and sumptuous living, and the favor of their rulers too well to ever task themselves for the good of the people. No; you sought a man whose very simplicity of dress and ruggedness of life and manner proved his self-forgetful devotion to your highest interests. A man who with keen speech and irresistible earnestness, but with a loving and a true heart, showed you the only way to God's kingdom. You went out to find one immeasurably wiser and better than any courtier that ever fawned at the feet of royalty. You went out

to see a prophet of God; yea, and more than a prophet!

Though the last of the grand brotherhood of foretellers, he is the greatest of them all: the only one whose career and office were themselves the subject of prophecy. Was not an angel commissioned to announce his birth?

Did not Malachi foretell his advent and office when he said, "Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts?" Mal. iii, 1. John is more than a prophet; more than a man of visions. He is a divinely accredited messenger to go before the Messiah's face; performing the duties of an office which elevates him to a height above that reached by Elijah, or Isaiah, or Samuel, or even the mighty lawgiver himself. He is a burning and a shining light, which has flashed once more across the hills of Judea, the radiance of the prophetic glory and testimony. John v, 33-35. But he is more than a prophet. He has stood out in the realities of life. He has battled with all powers that oppose the new kingdom. He has come in contact with living issues; he has taken up daily and dangerous duties; he has marshaled the hosts for the beginning of the great strife now raging; he has been a man among men, filled with an enthusiastic

love for humanity; and all this is nobler, grander than mere prophetic vision. In the full scope of his life, his divine call, his conscientious preparation, his self-forgetful spirit, his skill in delivering his message, his absolute fidelity to the truth, his persecution and probable martyrdom for righteousness' sake, he is the greatest among all that are born of woman. But let there be no mistake in this matter. John, with all his prestige as the last and best of the old dispensation, can never bring in that kingdom which, as Jehovah's messenger, he has so worthily and successfully announced. That is not a physical but a spiritual kingdom. It is set up in the heart. It cometh not with outward observation or show (Luke xvii, 20); it is God's pure empire within the soul. Therefore he that is comparatively less in the kingdom of heaven, according to its unerring standard, or who occupies a lower place in it, is greater than John, in respect of the development of his faith and spiritual life; as a member of the Church founded by Christ the Redeemer, as a truly enlightened Christian, he is, necessarily, greater than the greatest prophet of the old and external dispensation.\* He is superior in spiritual privileges. He knows more because more has been revealed to him. He has a larger hope. He has a closer and more conscious relationship to God, whom he has come to recognize as his Father. Into this kingdom, which is now among

\* For an elaboration of this point see Lange on Matt. xi, 11.

you, you all may press with holy and happy violence. Such vehement perseverance as has characterized John the forerunner, a perseverance ever natural to those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, will always be acceptable in the King's sight.\*

In this comprehensive and appreciative manner Jesus set the Baptist before the world in the sublime attitude which he must forever maintain; adding this explicit and important testimony, "And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come." To the Jews who listened to this remarkable eulogy of John, many of whom had been baptized by the prophet, and who believed in him heartily and loved him sincerely, this last declaration was the highest honor that had yet been bestowed upon the Baptist, for to them Elijah was the very greatest of all the prophets. Says Jesus, son of Sirach of Jerusalem :

" And Elias rose up a prophet like fire,  
And his word burnt like a torch ;  
Who brought a famine upon them,  
And by his zeal he diminished their number.  
By the word of the Lord he shut up heaven,  
And so three times brought down fire.  
O Elias, how wast thou made glorious in thy wondrous deeds !  
And who is like thee that he may glory !  
Who didst raise up a dead man from death,  
And from Hades, by the word of the Most High ;  
Who broughtest kings down to destruction,  
And honorable men from their bed ;  
Who heardest the rebuke on Sinai,

\* Matt. xi, 7-19.



And on Horeb the sentence of punishment;  
 Who anointedst kings for retribution,  
 And prophets as his successors;  
 Who wast taken up in a whirlwind of fire,  
 In a chariot with fiery horses;  
 Who wast written of in reproofs for special times,  
 To pacify wrath before its outbreak,  
 To turn the heart of the father to the son,  
 And to restore the tribes of Jacob.  
 Blessed are they that see thee, and are adorned with love;  
 For we also shall surely be alive." \*

On that part of the eulogy which refers to John's rank among the prophets, and his relation to the kingdom of heaven, Neander wisely says: "In regard to the relation of the old dispensation in general to Christianity, the fact that Christ places the Baptist *above* the prophets, who were the very culminating point of the old covenant, and yet so far *below* the members of the new development of the kingdom, exhibits in the most striking way possible his view of the distance between the old preparatory Testament and the New. The authority of Christ himself, therefore, is contradicted by those who expect to find the truth revealed by *him* already developed in the Old Testament. If in *John* we are to distinguish the fundamental truth which he held, and which pointed to the New Testament, from the limited and sensuous *form* in which he held it, much more, according to Christ's words, are we bound to do this in the Old Testament generally, and in its Messianic ele-

\* Ecclus. xlvi, 1-11, Lange's Edition.

ments especially. Following this intimation, we must, in studying the prophets, discriminate the historical from the ideal sense, the conscious from the unconscious prophecies. The testimony which Christ added in regard to the *effects* of John's labors corresponds precisely with the above view of his standpoint." \*

Jesus had long ere this perceived that while some who attended upon his ministry accepted him and his words with gratitude and joy, there were many among the learned teachers of the law who, with their especial followers, were always critical and captious, and sometimes even contemptuous. Struck with these contrasts, he now proceeds to point out the childish inconsistency of the fault-finders. He more than intimated that nothing could please such arrogant, self-opinionated, sour natures. They had already been addressed by two different messengers, one declaring that the kingdom of heaven was coming, and the other as explicitly stating that the kingdom of heaven had come, and yet they had refused to listen to either. They professed great reverence for the law, and yet when its utmost rigor came to them in the preaching of John the Baptist they were angry, and secretly stirred up Herod to put him out of the way. On the other hand, Jesus had come proclaiming the new Gospel, the glad evangel of gentleness and love, and again they were angry, and

\* *Life of Christ*, 215.

in scornful tones queried if any possible wisdom or good could come out of Nazareth. Even the mighty works which he did, especially in their chief cities (Matt. xi, 20-24), only furnished occasion for a more supercilious criticism.

They were determined not to be satisfied. In both cases they justified their meanness by picking out some trait of character, some act or word, and, with the most stubborn persistence, either misunderstanding or misrepresenting it, they turned it into a matter of complaint or fierce accusation. They were so unreasonable that it would be a waste of time and effort to attempt any further to conciliate them. They had actually made themselves ridiculous by their unmanly quibbling, and could be likened to nothing so aptly as to little children playing at weddings or at funerals in the market-places, some of whom, in their whimsical naughtiness, insisted upon being dissatisfied and making themselves disagreeable, whether the amusement were the joyous music of the flute and pipe, to tempt their nimble feet to dance, or the long, doleful wail of the simulated house of mourning. Like these pouting youngsters, the grumbling scribes and Pharisees would neither dance nor lament. They would respond to neither John nor Jesus. John had come to them in the coarse dress and stern asceticism of a hermit, with the fiery eloquence of a born orator, and with all the zeal and perseverance of a man absorbed in one great idea ;

but they turned away to call him mad—a crack-brained fanatic. Jesus came to them as a man in the world, though not exactly of it. He was gentle, courteous, refined. They met him at the banquet and at the marriage feast. He gladdened many a home with his cheerful presence, and accepted the grateful hospitality of all classes of men. He tried to show them just how a Christian should live. But again these implacable cavilers turned away to say, “Behold a man gluttonous, and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners.”

Jesus sententiously concluded his discourse, so far as it had any reference to John, in the words, “But Wisdom is justified of her children.” As much as to say, “These carping ‘children’ from among the learned and great of the nation, may assail and ridicule and denounce the Gospel in whatever form it comes to them, if they will, but there are other ‘children’ who, by accepting the Gospel—which is the wisdom of God (1 Cor. ii, 7)—have become the veritable children of Wisdom: they, in heart and in life, shall fully vindicate, against all unfriendly strictures, the ever-blessed kingdom of righteousness. Such ‘children’ will never disgrace me or my mission. Blind-minded and hard-hearted men may account their life as a fool’s life, and their end as dishonorable; but the very humblest of them shall, finally, be numbered among the children of God, and have their eternal portion with the saints.” Matt. xi, 25.

## CHAPTER XXV.

## THE BIRTHDAY FEAST.

JOHN the Baptist belonged to a transition period. He was a son of the old covenant. As Moses overlooked the promised land, but could not enter it, so John's eyes were gladdened by the dawn of the new dispensation in the full glory of which he was not permitted to participate. His life seems to have been more a protest than a victory. ✧ He was a martyr, but he died as Hugh Latimer died when he cried out to his companion, while they were burning at the stake, "Be of good comfort, Master Ridley, and play the man; we shall this day light such a candle by God's grace in England as shall never be put out." ✕ Men may say that John was an unsuccessful reformer, and yet he prepared the way for the greatest and most lasting reformation the world has ever known. He plowed and sowed for others to reap. He was set to no easy task. It required courage, faith, and strength of character such as few men have shown to the world. His trials were constant, severe, and peculiar, until, at last, he was called to suffer an untimely and violent death to gratify the vengeance of a wicked and worthless woman. But we have no evidence that his loyal



soul wavered, even for a moment, in its purpose. After the baptism and public testimony to the character of Jesus, his career was one unbroken series of disappointments, and no doubt he was often sorely perplexed; but we cannot say that a single murmur ever escaped his lips. For one so aggressive and fiery in temperament, it was no easy thing to patiently submit to what seemed a humiliating defeat; but his was the spirit of a true prophet, and he was only anxious to know that at every step his own soul was in accord with God's purpose and methods. The contrast between the green banks of the Jordan, with the multitude swayed by his eloquence or crowding to his baptism, and the gloomy dungeon of Machærus, was striking indeed; but at no period of his career was the declaration of Christ that he was one of the greatest men of that or any other age so justly applicable as in the closing scenes of his life.

The somewhat lenient treatment which Herod had at first accorded to his prisoner could not, in the very nature of the case, long continue. The prophet was often summoned to the monarch's presence, and as often he bore his relentless testimony against the tetrarch's heaven-defying sin in the unvarying words, "It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife." Matt. xiv, 4; Mark vi, 18, 20; Luke iii, 19. Herod could not fail to recognize the voice of God sounding in his ears. He was not entirely bereft of manhood, and his debauched nature was compelled to render a

sort of homage to truth and even-handed justice as personified in his defenseless captive. It was to a great extent, however, the homage of fear; a guilty fear which afterward made him tremble at the report of Jesus's miracles, in the belief that it was John risen from the grave, and recommissioned with supernatural power to confirm and strengthen the good and condemn and torment the wicked before their time. Luke ix, 7; Matt. xiv, 1, 2. "Herod, though in his palace surrounded with his royal guards, feared him. He knew the Baptist was stronger than he, for truth is mighty, and mightily prevaieth; and being already conscious of his offendings, and having enough to do to keep down the voices of crime and transgression within him, he feared this righteous man, whose words gave such edge to his self-accusations, such point to his remorse. Unarmed, the Baptist daunted him more than an army of men, an embattled city, or a fenced tower, or any other source of physical and outward force. It reminds me of the saying of the first James, when Knox's daughter came to petition for her husband Welsh's pardon. The monarch asked her who she was; she replied, 'The daughter of John Knox.' 'Knox and Welsh,' said he, 'that is a fearful conjunction of bloods. And had your father any sons?' 'No, only three daughters.' 'Had his three daughters been three sons,' said the conscience-stricken monarch, 'I would ill have brinked' (enjoyed) 'my three kingdoms in peace.

He may return if he will consent never to preach again.' 'Sooner than he should consent to that,' said the godly and heroic woman, 'I would kep' (catch as it fell from the block) 'his bloody head here,' stretching out the matronal apron in which she was attired."\*

Herodias regarded John, prisoner though he was, as a stubborn disturber of her peace. While he lived she could never feel quite secure in the position to gain which she had outraged conscience and defied public opinion. His influence constantly jeopardized her crown if not her life, for she knew that the tetrarch's conscience sorely troubled him at times, especially when aroused and strengthened by the Baptist's plain speech, and that in some fit of ungovernable repentance he might cast her off to a life of disappointment and shame. It is not difficult for us to imagine with what venomous hatred the haughty granddaughter of Herod the Great must have regarded the man who, to her, was an upstart marplot, cunningly working upon the superstition and credulity of her vacillating lord. Bent on vengeance, she only waited a favorable opportunity to strike a blow which would effectually rid her of the tormentor and at the same time render her own position more secure. In the meantime, however, Antipas stood between her and the prisoner. It was no mean tribute to the greatness of John that, by the loftiness of his char-

\* Irving's Works, iii, 150.

acter and his just popularity among the people, he was able to restrain even this crowned knave from fatal violence, and to awaken occasional flashes of good desire or worthy purpose in his craven soul. But Herod was a most capricious tyrant, brooking no interference with the exercise of his despotic power, especially in this wild and border district, where the life of a man who had no armed following was reckoned as of little worth; hence, in the nature of the case, John's safety could not long continue, and the Jezebel who thirsted for his blood was likely at any time to gain her end through a sudden fit of anger on the part of her royal paramour, or by her own consummate craftiness. Salome, the daughter of Herodias, was as dissolute and ambitious as her mother, fully participating in her feeling and heartily entering into her wicked plans; so, at last, what they had failed to gain by direct and passionate influence their combined ingenuity enabled them to compass by subtle and characteristic fraud.

In imitation of the Roman emperors, the Herodian princes were accustomed to spend vast sums of money in sumptuous banquets and anniversary festivities. Antipas entered upon his reign about the year 4 B. C., and had the good fortune to hold his throne for over thirty years. Each recurring anniversary of his accession was celebrated, according to a family custom, with especial rejoicings.\* The tetrarch's birthday

\* Josephus, *Ant.*, xv, 11, 6.

was always observed in a similar manner. It was on one of these latter occasions, the date of which we can fix approximately in the summer or autumn of A. D. 29,\* that Antipas sent out invitations to all the chief men of his realm to a celebration to be conducted upon a scale of especial magnificence at Machærus, where the tetrarch made his headquarters, probably as the most convenient point for the oversight and management of his forces in holding in check Aretas, his quondam father-in-law. The chief captains and officers of the army, the lords and first men of Galilee and Perea, the sheiks of the neighboring tribes whom Herod was anxious to retain as friendly allies, together with such Roman dignitaries as were within reach, were all summoned to the royal castle. Mark vi, 21.

The enormous wealth of the Herods, the architectural magnificence of their palaces and castles, and especially their well-known tendency to extravagant display, make it certain that this feast, so far as the chosen purpose of Antipas was concerned, was a most memorable affair, and that, for the time being at least, Machærus was a very paradise for both the gourmand and the sensualist. The palace was hung with garlands of flowers, the apartments were brilliantly illuminated, the tables were spread with the most costly and ostentatious luxuries, and the rarest wines flowed as freely as water. †

\* Renan's *Life of Jesus*, 130. † Persius, Satire v, 180-184.



The mirth and revelry were unrestrained, and many a weak head besides that of Antipas was fairly turned by the excitement and excesses of the hour. A luxurious feast of this period was not regarded as complete without the presence of female dancers, who gratified the sensual tastes of the guests with some gross pantomimic representation, often as indecent and degrading as it was graceful and artistic. In these particulars the dance was very like our most sensational modern ballet. The dancer was usually masked, to conceal the face, but the dress was so arranged that the beauty of the figure was shown to the best advantage, and the performer was untrammelled in the skillful expression of various feelings and passions. The subject of this pantomimic dance was usually mythological, and therefore the performance was essentially heathen. But Antipas was as much pagan as Jew, and so did not scruple to introduce it as a prominent feature of his entertainments, for the special delectation of his Gentile guests. His father before him had set an example in this particular by building in his palace a theater for the Thymelici.\* In accordance with this evil fashion of the day the tetrarch had arranged for the dance, and in addition to the regular programme Herodias, who was not permitted by Eastern custom to be present at the festive board with men, but was

\* *Dict. of Antiquities*, art. "Pantomimus." Farrar's *Life of Christ*, chap. 28.

in her own private apartments at the castle, had artfully provided a genuine surprise and pleasure for the tetrarch and his guests.

Her daughter Salome,\* a granddaughter of Herod the Great and Mariamne, a descendant, therefore, of Simon the high-priest, and the great line of Maccabean princes—a princess who afterward became the wife of a tetrarch and the mother of a king—boldly broke over the restraints of respectable custom and in extravagant honor to the occasion, but with real dishonor to herself, suddenly appeared before Herod and his band of half-intoxicated revellers as the chief performer in a scenic dance. She was then in the very flush of her young and lustrous beauty, and her performance was a great success. Herod was nearly wild with wine and the excitement of this unexpected pleasure.

It has always been customary for royalty, under such circumstances, to bestow gifts upon successful performers—a practice still in vogue at the courts of Europe—and Herod, in his drunken delirium,

\* Wisdom is justified of her children sometimes in curious ways. Scrivener, Burgon, and their less competent imitator, Edward Miller, have indulged in great ridicule against Westcott and Hort for calling the daughter of Herodias “Herodias,” in the Gospel of Mark, when Josephus testifies that her name was Salome. But the publication of the *Book of the Bee* shows that the Syrian traditions call her Botiya, yet at the same time say that “some relate that she was called Herodias, after the name of her mother.”—See *The Independent*, Sept. 1, 1887.

determined on a recompense that should be worthy the high station of the favorite. Forgetting for the moment that he occupied his throne at the will of the Emperor Tiberius, and could perform no important act without his consent, he rashly vowed that he would give to the brazen-faced beauty any thing she might choose to ask, even to the half of his kingdom. In this extravagant promise Herod is not alone either among ancient or modern magnates of the Orient. Calmet mentions a Shah Abbas who promised to a dancer, during a drunken carouse, the revenues of a province. After his recovery, at the instance of his vizier, he broke his promise and gave her a present of two hundred pounds.

Salome would doubtless have ambitiously chosen the half of the kingdom, but did not venture to decide the matter without the opinion of her mother, whom she hastened to consult. Mark vi, 24. Herodias, by a strange freak of fortune, now suddenly stood face to face with the opportunity she had so long coveted. Like the vain woman that she was, fond of ostentatious display, she might naturally have asked for a palace more beautiful than Herod had yet built, or for robes and jewels that would exhaust the skill and patience of the world's best artisans; or, doubtful of her personal security, now that her world-famed beauty had begun to fade, she might have demanded that under no possible circumstances would Herod listen to the voice of con-

science or the prophet and put her away. But she was too much of a Herod herself to be satisfied with things so commonplace as these. Revenge was sweeter to her than any other boon which even a prince could grant, and unhesitatingly she met the question of her daughter with the fierce command, "Ask of him the head of John the Baptizer." One can imagine that she hissed out the awful words with all the venom of a demon, while her face, which men had so often deemed fascinating in its radiant loveliness, was now black with malignant hate. The tiger in her nature was thoroughly aroused. She was eager for the sight of blood. Salome was an apt pupil, and, sharing her mother's fear that if the matter was deferred until Herod had time to give it his second sober thought he would break his oath, she straightway with haste (Mark vi, 25) returned to the banquet hall while the mad revel was yet on, and startled the king with the demand that he should perform the blackest deed of a black and selfish life by giving her immediately,\* in the presence of the assembled guests, the severed head of John the Baptist.

\* "Give me *here*." Matt. xiv, 8.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

## THE EXECUTION.

THE charger (Matt. xiv, 6-12) in which Salome explicitly stipulated the chosen gift should be presented to her, might have been a dish or platter of any kind used for serving up food, but was probably one of the golden dishes which graced the board of the opulent tyrant, the use of which would be in keeping with the spirit of the occasion, and especially appropriate to this insane mingling of revelry and slaughter.

When the young and beautiful girl imperiously made her devilish demand the guests may have been excited to increased merriment by the unique and monstrous exhibition; but Herod was sobered in a moment. Conflicting emotions raged in his bosom. He was angry at thought of the mean advantage his unprincipled spouse had taken of him, for he had no difficulty in discerning her cunning hand back of the pretty puppet whose graceful antics had turned his muddled head. He was disappointed and grieved by such a tragic termination of his birthday feast. No doubt he had often desired John's death, yet he was appalled and sick at heart that it should now be



brought about through such an agency. With all his arrogance, Herod feared the people, and he knew well that their fiercest anger would be aroused by this story of the cruel death of John, whom they loved and revered as a prophet of God. They would think it bad enough for the Baptist to die in the very prime of life, even though his end were natural and peaceful; but to be slain without trial or warning, merely to gratify the hate of a vile and dissolute woman and to give an added zest to a drunken carousal, were an outrage which could hardly fail to stir up revolt against the tetrarch's tyranny. Besides all this, Herod himself shared, to quite a degree, the religious awe with which the multitude regarded the Baptist's character and calling.

On the other hand, a despicable pride rose up to overmaster his reason and his fear. He fancied that he was fairly in Salome's power; that his honor would be seriously compromised if he refused to abide by his oath.

The sacredness of an oath to an Eastern monarch is strikingly shown in a story which Herodotus relates of Xerxes, the famous Persian king and conqueror. A young and beautiful favorite had greatly pleased the monarch, and he promised, with an oath, to give her whatever she asked. Forthwith she foolishly asked a splendid cloak he was wearing, which had been woven for him by his wife. Partly from liking for the cloak, but more for terror of his

wife, he would not consent to this; but, to honor his oath, he gave her a city and a vast sum in gold, and a military force which she alone should command.\*

To be sure, Herod might as well be a perjurer as a murderer, and a wicked promise, especially when made in unthinking haste, is better broken than kept; but he feared the laugh and the future criticisms of the high personages who sat at meat with him more than he feared to do wrong, or dreaded the lashes of an outraged conscience. To his guests it was a huge though ghastly joke, but to him it was a most terrible tragedy; and yet he had not moral courage to repudiate the request as not in harmony with either the letter or the spirit of his oath. He forgot that "two wrongs never make a right," and deliberately chose to keep his foolish promise at the expense of his judgment, his moral sense, his political astuteness, and his manliness. "A point of honor rises here. He must not flinch, but keep his pledge before his honorable fellows. A duelist or a gambler is the very model of such faith."

In this cruel act, which has covered his name with everlasting infamy, Herod stands as the representative of a large class, not only in his day, but in our own. The man who outrages the sacred rights of the domestic circle by appearing before his family in a state of intoxication, and finds his excuse in the social duties

\* Herodotus, ix, 108-112.

he owes to his friends, who insisted upon his joining them in a convivial glass; the thousands of men and women who plunge into reckless extravagances, leading to financial ruin, and justify themselves with the old plea of the necessity of keeping up appearances; business men who are guilty of dishonorable practices, and then hide behind the so-called necessities of the case in a last effort to ward off impending ruin; together with the multitudes who deliberately do evil in the hope that good may follow, all belong in the same category with the tetrarch of Galilee. Wrong is always wrong; and there can be no circumstances which before the bar of a true morality and a true conscience will justify it.

But all the habits, associations, and acts of Herod's past life had conspired to make him weak at this crisis in his career, and we are not surprised by the decision at which he finally arrived. Summoning, therefore, the officer of the guard, he commanded him to take an executioner, and, with all possible dispatch, bring to the royal presence John's head.

It was probably at night, when the Baptist upon his dungeon couch was dreaming that the Deliverer, for whose advent he had hoped so often in his waking thoughts, had come at last. And now, suddenly aroused by the rattling of the bolt, and the flash of the unaccustomed light, he is confronted not by the Worker of mighty miracles, come to cheer and save his too-long-forgotten friend and forerunner, but by

the grim executioner, who bids him bare his neck and bow his head at once to the fatal stroke. It was now, for the first time, that "the shadow of the cross, cast by the shining of the crown always above and beyond it," fell upon the events of this new movement in Israel.

"See the murder of John. Jesus letting him go unrescued to the block marks with a red initial the rejection of all elements of compulsion—the final divorce of righteousness from violence—in the methods of the kingdom. Peter's confession is the positive to that negative. Its spirit and power was the rock on which Christ would, as the spirit and power of Elijah was that on which he would not, build his Church. The transfiguration is heaven's acceptance of the new foundation, through that very Moses and Elijah whom it superseded. Even in the payment of the half-shekel we may see the infant Church's first applied lesson to meek endurance of injustice for loving ends. All these prepare us somewhat to understand how Christ could choose to go to certain death, and yet his action and intent be as far from suicide as one pole of heaven is from the other.

"He never, actively or passively, sought the cross. He willingly endured it, rather than swerve one hand-breadth from seeking, for our sakes, the crown. He said of his life, 'I lay it down myself;' and to die was his choice, but it was not his wish. His choice when sinful man thrust it before him with the two

alternatives, either to abandon the establishment of his kingdom or else to call into service that 'violence'—that compulsion—which that kingdom had forever put aside. It was only rather than these that he chose to move on to and through death and disgrace, and win thereby, stained only with his own blood, that first complete victory over sin instead of over sinners, the method of which, repeated in his followers, insures sin's final destruction. Thus he could say, 'Behold, we go up to Jerusalem,' and yet be guiltless of his own certain death.

"We call that to which he was going the passion, but it was the most aggressive action and attitude of his life. The time was ripe. The first great duty of the Messianic office—to reveal the kingdom, to plant it in humble hearts, to found its Church in consecrated human lives—was done. Now the strategic moment and the supreme strategic necessity cried, 'On to Jerusalem.' Thither he turned to a foreseen death, not seeking it, but 'despising' it, *when it stood between him and the conquest to which God had sent him*; went, according to his unbelieving kinsmen's challenge, to 'manifest himself,' to enter the world's capital of spiritual truth, to purge its temple, and there to proclaim himself that way, truth, and life—that only perfect art, science, and practical example of true living—which makes him the only leader of men into the kingdom of God."\*

\* George W. Cable's remarks on Matt. xx, 17-28.



It was a short warning indeed to John. No explanation was given. There was none to give. Not a day, not an hour even, was vouchsafed for final preparation. The tyrant's order for instant execution was imperative. The damsel and the guests were waiting for the grand finale of their choice bit of tragedy, and the king's menials must not trespass upon their patience.

There was no chronicler to witness the martyr's death, and then to tell us how he looked and what he said. But we may be sure he bore himself like the prince of brave and good men that he was. He knew that his short life was complete; that in it the measure of God's plan and order was gloriously filled. His prophet's vision pierced the veil which hid the upper from the lower world, and he saw that he was now to reach, by a quicker and a shorter route than even his Master, the eternal glories of that heavenly kingdom he had so eloquently and faithfully heralded. His king was to die a felon's death, and was the servant to be above his lord?

Like a true soldier, he instantly girded up his spirit to meet his doom. A moment or two of prayer; a thought, or perhaps a shout of triumph, and the death-blow fell. "Death opened to the captive the gates of Machærus, that it might usher him into the liberty of the kingdom of God."

The infernal deed was done. Our hero had fairly won the martyr's crown. He died as he had lived:

with the same bold, startling decision and promptness. In another moment the well-trained executioner appeared before the expectant revelers, clutching by its long hair that noble head, which at once was placed upon the dish from the royal table and presented to the damsel, who, now transformed into a hideous waitress at the feast of death, bore it to her mother. "Let us hope that the awful spectacle haunted the souls of both thenceforth till the end of life."

It was a terrible winding-up of the feast of Herod—the sting of which was forever after to torture his soul. How was it with the more guilty, because more deliberately vindictive, Herodias? No doubt, for the moment the sense of hated vengeance filled her heart with joy, when she looked upon the dimmed eye that no more could flash reproof, and the palsied tongue that could never again denounce her sin. But as she gazed the old-time sternness seemed to darken and intensify upon the rigid features of the man of God, until her flinty heart grew faint, her joy turned to horror, and she waved the ghastly object from her sight.

Weird and barbarous as this scene appears, it is still in horrible keeping with many incidents recorded of Eastern courts in that savage age. As a sequel to his account of the favorite who chose, as a reward, the cloak which Xerxes wore, Herodotus says that Amestris, the wife of that monarch, thinking that the

young girl had been led by her mother to ask the cloak, determined that that unfortunate lady should be destroyed. Amestris, therefore, on a birthday festival of her husband, demanded that he should give up the wife of Masistes to her jealous rage. This he hesitated to do, but Amestris was so persistent in her request that he fancied he could not, on that day, refuse. No entreaty of Masistes could avail for his wife, whom he sincerely loved, Xerxes having once commanded her to be surrendered to her rival. Nor is the grim parallel to the fury of Herodias wanting, for the spearmen of Xerxes were forthwith sent by the frantic Amestris, and cut her rival to pieces, throwing her in fragments to the dogs.\* Caligula, crowned Emperor of Rome A. D. 37, often caused criminals, and even innocent persons, to be stretched on the rack or beheaded for the amusement of himself and his guests at his feasts; and honors were bestowed upon the swordsmen who showed the most skill in this kind of butchery. At a public banquet of especial magnificence, he ordered the executioner to strike off the hands of a slave accused of having taken a silver plate from one of the couches, and made the poor wretch go round and round the tables with his hands hanging on his breast, from a string round his neck, a board being carried before him inscribed with his offense.†

\* Herodotus ix, 103-112.

† Anthon's Classical Dict., art. "Caligula;" Geikie, vol. i, p. 431.

John's headless trunk was left upon the prison floor, or perhaps, as tradition tells us, Herodias ordered it to be flung out over the battlements for dogs and vultures to devour. In either case, when the disciples of John heard what had happened they came at once to the castle, and Herod, perhaps moved by penitence, or fear, to some show of kindness, permitted them to take up the corpse and bear it tenderly and sadly away to burial. Matt. xiv, 12.

Moses, the first great prophet of Israel, was buried upon a mountain-top, or in a secluded ravine, not far from the hallowed spot where John, the last prophet of the noble line, was now entombed. Until this day, however, no man knows exactly the sepulcher of either the lawgiver or the baptizer. Traditions which have no reliable foundation locate John's tomb in various noted shrines of Palestine, chief of which is the Church of St. John, in the city of Samaria, built in honor of their patron the Baptist by the Knights of St. John in the days of the crusades. The ruins of this ancient church show that it was originally a noble structure, in every way worthy the prophet whose grand character it commemorates; but there is not a shadow of proof that the tomb still pointed out, and revered by Romanists and Mohammedans alike, ever contained the remains of our Lord's great forerunner.

Unquestionably John was buried in an unknown grave, toward which, as to a sacred shrine, no pilgrim

feet have ever trod ; yet the same all-wise and all-truthful Friend who pronounced him the greatest among them that are born of women, again speaking through the lips of his chosen evangelist, has pronounced his brief but perfect epitaph : " John fulfilled his course." Acts xiii, 25.

James must have had the Baptist in mind, as well as the Old Testament heroes, when he wrote : " Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience. Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord ; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy." James v, 10, 11. To one like John the Baptist, who is a comparatively unappreciated innovator in society, whose work is to prepare the way for others to sow and reap, death is kind. To one who, after such a brilliant but brief public career, must henceforth decrease while another will increase, sixty or seventy years could be no less than an intolerable burden. God did not thus afflict his faithful servant. ✕ Like Jesus, he *finished* the work he came to do, and, like Jesus, he gained a timely entrance into glory through the sweep of a divine and irresistible tide ; and in the great day of the Lord there will be no one, save Jesus himself, who will be greeted by the glorified preachers of the truth with a more enrapturing thrill or a deeper joy than this mighty man of God, whose



name must ever be a synonym for moral strength and fidelity.

Let us turn and give a parting look at the man—the greatest of all Israelites, who has no superior in any day or generation. Let us not belittle him by any sentimental pity for his misfortunes, and so “insult the dignity of all struggling souls, and make utilitarians of all benefactors, and give false views of success.” He has conferred a benefit upon the world so transcendent that it can scarcely be appreciated even in the best age and by the brightest minds. Who among men could compensate him for such a service? His refined soul would value lightly all worldly honors, as it soared far above and beyond all vulgar rewards. More than any other great historical character, he was unselfish, disinterested, and true to his exalted mission; a most noble specimen both of a man and a prophet, whose work and example will form a large part of the world’s richest inheritance for all time to come. We regret his quickly closing days, after such a brief but unexampled career of power and influence, but it would be puerile affectation to pity him: we may as well commiserate Socrates, or Paul, or Stephen, or John Huss, as he cries out at the stake, “In the truth of that Gospel which hitherto I have written, taught, and preached, *I now joyfully die.*” The greatest men have come to their coronation through the pains of martyrdom. Their light may have been obscured, for a time, by a cloud

of ignominy and cruel hatred, but has never been extinguished; and in another and a juster age it has flamed up again, to gladden successive generations in their toilsome progress toward a full redemption of the human mind and heart. The truth which, through the inspired wisdom and eloquence of John, gained its signal triumph at the beginning of our era has never since faltered in its all-conquering march, has never waned in aggressive force for want of either heralds or heroes, clear expounders of precept, or faithful teachers by example; so the world has been steadily growing freer and better from his day to ours. Each generation has prepared the way for a better and more successful age to follow. John was the forerunner of Christ, the herald of all that Christianity has brought us.

So let us rather congratulate John than sorrow for him. In the glowing words of one who himself manifested the spirit of a moral hero, though he lacked the wisdom and will to give it safe direction, let us say: "The Baptist has done the Almighty good service—he has not turned back on any occasion from his perilous duty—he has kept his Nazarite ritual both in body and spirit, sustaining the one by the simplest meat and the other upon the hardest conditions. The Almighty heard the voice which he spoke always for his well-beloved Son; he saw that he spoke truth and held his integrity steadfast unto the end. And perceiving in his servant such noble

and excellent qualities, he resolved to perfect him for a high place in heaven, and so directed his footsteps to the fiery furnace of a court, that the temper of his truth and piety might be purified manifold. And in the fiery furnace he walked with his servant, so that his spirit was not harmed, and having thus annealed his nature to the utmost which this earth could do, he took him hastily away and placed him among the glorified in heaven."\*

After John's disciples had performed the simple funeral rites, their first care was, with sore if not bitter hearts, to go and tell Jesus that his friend and forerunner was dead. Matt. xiv, 12. "And to whom should these orphans of the martyred prophet go but to him, the prophet's greater Lord?" About the same time the twelve disciples of Jesus returned from their mission "to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. x, 6), and with them Jesus immediately took his departure northward. "Our Lord gives to his disciples, as a reason for this departure, their need of retirement and rest. And in relation to them it was a true and tender reason, but in regard to himself and his mission a far higher reason existed. When Jesus at his early home in Nazareth heard that John was baptizing in Jordan he doubtless realized that he was summoned to enter upon the preparation for his ministry. Yet after his baptism he still stood in the background while his messenger

\* Edward Irving's Works, iii, 180.

was preparing his way before him. After that time the key of all the transactions between the Baptist and the Messiah is furnished in John's words, 'He must increase and I must decrease.' The subordinate must gradually retire before his superior. When John was imprisoned, therefore, a period arrived in which our Lord commenced his opening ministry. The subordinate ceases his labors, but he and his disciples are still extant. But with the forerunner's expiring breath the interregnum closes and the Lord enters upon his full office. At that same period our Lord is commissioning his twelve and sending them forth as apostles to the twelve tribes. His fame is filling the halls of Herod Antipas. It is both a crisis of great danger and the period of his broadest enlargement. To avoid the ruling powers, whose eyes are now in search of him, he departs for northern Galilee, where he spends the whole of this period of his ministry. He crosses the Lake of Gennesaret, followed by thousands; he is at one time at the extreme north-west, even at Tyre and Sidon, and soon at the extreme north-east, at Cesarea Philippi. Though an apparent refugee from the ruling power, his field is broadening, his fame spreading, and his disciples unite in the completest recognition of his Messiahship. That meridian point attained, this period closes and the ministry of his sorrow commences." \*

\* Whedon on Matthew, p. 183.

## CONCLUSION.

FROM the moment he had been entrapped into committing the terrible murder with which his despised name will forever be connected, Herod had no peace. As Theodoric, who had ordered the foul murder of Symmachus, was ever after haunted, and at last driven mad by a vision of the old man's pain-distorted features glaring at him from a dish on the table, so Herod's mind could never have been free from the accusing look of the man who had dared to deal faithfully with him even at the cost of his life, and whom the tyrant in his secret soul must have regarded as most holy and just. And when he heard but a short time afterward of a new prophet who had risen in the land, and who performed mighty miracles, it is no wonder that he was startled, and—speaking in confidence to his intimate associates and counselors—gave vent to his superstitious fears in the words, "This is John the Baptist; he is risen from the dead, and therefore mighty works are wrought by him." Matt. xiv, 2. He knew that a resurrected prophet, endowed with miraculous power, would make small account of armed guards, or bolts and bars of massive iron, and no doubt lived in daily dread lest his ever-to-be-



triumphant enemy should suddenly appear in the stronghold of Machærus or the gilded halls of Julius or Tiberius, to execute vengeance upon his cowardly persecutor. So this mighty servant of God, who had not feared his oppressor in life, in death domineered over him by day and by night, giving him no peace, planting thorns in his unhallowed couch, imbittering every feast and poisoning every cup of pleasure. No supernatural vengeance overtook him, however. He was left to the sometimes slow but always exact and inevitable justice of God, and in that the conscience-smitten criminal found the most terrible and fitting compensation for his crimes.

It is only necessary to make here a brief reference to the after career of Herod and Herodias. Shortly after the death of the Baptist, Antipas returned to Tiberias to continue a life of effeminate luxury. Salome was soon married to Philip, the tetrarch of Trachonitis, her paternal uncle, who was already an old man, and who in a few years died childless, when Salome returned again to her mother. This ill-assorted marriage was a pure speculation on the part of Herodias, who expected by it to get control of the territory of her enfeebled son-in-law. But she was sadly disappointed, for, on Philip's death, the emperor incorporated Trachonitis with the province of Syria.

As the years went by Herodias's unchecked temper grew more and more violent and imperious. Her

ambition, too, seemed to increase rather than diminish by disappointment, until it well-nigh drove her mad and quite proved the ruin of herself and Antipas. The favors shown by the Emperor Caius (Caligula) to Herod Agrippa I. filled the soul of Herodias with envy, and she gave Antipas no rest until he consented to set out with her for Rome, where she hoped to gain such influence with the emperor as to secure equal distinction and advancement with her fortunate brother. She was especially anxious that her husband should secure the title of king, instead of being content with the more humble one of tetrarch. Antipas loved his ease, had grown excessively timid during these later years, and had no heart for such ambitious schemes, especially when, as he tried to point out to his wife, they involved both political and personal danger. But Herodias was determined, and they persevered in their enterprise. The event fully justified Antipas's fears. The numerous princes and potentates of the Herod family bore no particular love for each other, and Agrippa, fearing that Antipas would interfere more or less with his own ambitious plans for promotion and favor, actually concocted a charge of treason against the tetrarch. This charge was prosecuted before the emperor, and Antipas, failing to clear himself, was deprived of his kingdom and banished, in A. D. 39, to Lugdunum—probably St. Bertrand de Comminges, in Gaul, not far from the Spanish frontier. Accord-

ing to some authorities Herodias was offered a pardon and the emperor made her a present of money, telling her that it was her brother Agrippa who prevented her being involved in the same calamity as her husband. The best trait of her character is shown when, in true Jewish spirit, she refused this offer, and voluntarily chose to share the exile of her husband.\* Both died in obscurity and dishonor.

Salome was married the second time to her cousin Aristobulus, by whom she had three sons. Whether vengeance ever overtook her for her many crimes we cannot surely tell, but there is a legendary account of her death, to the effect that she accompanied her mother Herodias and her father-in-law Herod in their banishment; and on their journey, as they passed over a river that was frozen, the ice broke under her feet and she sank in up to her neck, when, the ice uniting again, she remained thus suspended by it, and suffered the same punishment she had made John the Baptist undergo.†

Great honors have been paid to the memory of John the Baptist, in the Roman Catholic Church especially. He has not only been canonized as a saint, but two festivals are celebrated in his honor: the 24th of June, in devout remembrance of his birth, and the 29th of August, to commemorate his "decollation."

\* See McClintock and Strong's Cyclopedia, art. "Herod."

† Niceph. H. E., i, 20.

Numerous churches have been erected in memory of his holy life, and honored with his name. "In all the early Christian edifices, even in the catacombs, there was set apart a baptistery, with a font for the baptizing of children and converts, always dedicated to St. John the Baptist." \*

The Baptist is the patron saint of the city of Florence, Italy, and the magnificent baptistery adjoining the cathedral stands as a hallowed shrine to all true lovers of art, depicting as it does, in carved stone and precious bronzes (which attest the genius of such masters as Giotto, Ghiberti, and Andrea Pisano), the life and work of the great forerunner. The world-renowned cathedral of Amiens is dedicated to John, and the appreciative visitor never tires of studying the superb series of sculptures in *alto-relievo* surrounding the choir, and representing successive events in the prophet's wonderful career. In painting, Leonardo, Raphael, Rubens, Vandyke, Murillo, and other masters of lesser note taxed their skill to the utmost in working out their ideals of the childhood and vigorous young manhood of the herald of Christ. Poets, too, have taken up the theme in many noble productions in many languages, while the greatest masters of music have with equal reverence and skill laid their offerings at the Baptist's feet. Thus history and poesy, religion and art, science and song, have vied with each other in perpetuating the spirit and

\* Mrs. Jameson.

the work of this man of God, this glorious herald of the morning. ✕

A curious illustration of the credulity and superstition of the Roman Catholic Church is given in the so-called historical statements as to the final disposition made of the remains of John the Baptist. Rufinus and Theodoret certify that his corpse was entombed at Sebaste, in Samaria. Mohammedans have named it the "Tomb of the Prophet John, the Son of Zacharias."

Romanists say this tomb was violated by the pagans in the reign of Julian, and the greater part of the prophet's body was burned. Such portions as were preserved by the Christians were secured by Athanasius and deposited in a crypt beneath a magnificent Church which Theodosius erected in Alexandria A. D. 396. Small portions of the sacred ashes were sent to other churches in various parts of Christendom to bless their devout custodians and work miracles for the benefit of the faithful.

We are further assured that certain holy men, under divine guidance, actually discovered the severed head of the Baptist in Jerusalem A. D. 453. After various vicissitudes of fortune, its guardians transported the head to Emessa, in Syria, where a church was built to receive it. In A. D. 800 the holy relic was removed to Constantinople. In A. D. 1204 Constantinople was captured by the French. They found that part of the skull had disappeared, but



secured the face, which they reverently brought to Amiens, and deposited in a costly shrine, built for the purpose, in the cathedral Church already mentioned. Part of the skull is also said to be preserved in St. Silvester's Church in Rome, but just how its genuineness is established we are not informed.

Cardinal Wiseman has shown quite as much bigotry as skill in his lengthy argument to demonstrate that since, from personal inspection, he is satisfied that these widely scattered portions would fit into one another if brought together, there can be but little doubt that when joined they constitute the veritable head of John the Baptist.\*

As a worthy specimen of a style of investigation and argument peculiar to the anointed scholars of the Roman Catholic Church, I append a portion of Cardinal Wiseman's dissertation upon the above mentioned relic, as quoted and approved by one of equal authority with its learned author, at least among Romanists :

Suffice it to say that, according to travelers, there are three heads of St. John. Now, as I have said, a body can be divided, but you can hardly imagine this to be the case with a head. I will read you an extract, then, from Sir John Mandeville :

“From thence we go up to Samaria, which is now called Sebaste: it is the chief city of that country. There was wont to be the head of St. John the Baptist inclosed in the wall, but the Emperor Theodosius had it drawn out, and found it wrapped in a little cloth, all bloody, and so he carried it to Constantinople; and the hinder part of the head is still at

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\* See Stanley's *Sinai and Palestine*, p. 242; Tillemont, *Mémoires*, vol. i, pp. 82-108; *Acta Sanct.*, iv, pp. 687-846.

Constantinople; and the fore part of the head, to under the chin, under the Church of St. Silvester, where are nuns, and it is yet all broiled, as though it were half burnt; for the Emperor Julian, above mentioned, of his wickedness and malice, burnt that part with other bones, as may still be seen; and this thing hath been proved both by popes and emperors. And the jaws beneath which hold to the chin, and a part of the ashes, and the platter on which the head was laid when it was smitten off, are at Genoa; and the Genoese make a great feast in honor of it, and so do the Saracens also. And some men say that the head of St. John is at Amiens, in Picardy; and other men say that it is the head of St. John the bishop. I know not which is correct, but God knows; but, however men worship it, the blessed St. John is satisfied."

This is a true Catholic sentiment. Right or wrong, all mean to honor St. John, and there is an end of it. We could not expect a traveler going through the country like Sir John, not visiting every place, but hearing one thing from one and another from another, to tell us the exact full truth. But we have here two very important points gained. First, we have the singular fact of the division of the head at all. We occasionally hear of the head of a saint being at a particular place, but seldom of a part of a head being in one place and a part in another. Here we have an unprejudiced traveler going into the East. He comes to the place where the head of St. John used to be kept, and he finds there the tradition that it was divided into three parts, one of which was at Constantinople, one at Genoa, and another at Rome. Then he adds, "Other people say that the head is at Amiens." So much Sir John Mandeville further informs us. He mentions the place where it was reported the head was, telling us that it was divided into three. This is a statement worthy of being verified. It was made a long time ago, and yet the traditions remain the same. It was as well believed in the thirteenth century in the East, at Sebaste, as it is in Europe at the present moment. The Church of St. Silvester in Capite is a small church on the east side of the Corso, entered by a sort of vestibule; it has an atrium or court,

with arches round, and dwellings for the chaplains. The outer gates can be shut at night, so as to prevent completely any access to the church. The rest is an immense building belonging to the nuns. When the Republicans in the late invasion got hold of Rome the first thing which they did was to turn out the monks and nuns right and left, to make barracks; and the poor nuns of St. Silvester were ordered to move. The head of St. John is in a shrine which looks very brilliant, and the nuns kept it in jealous custody in their house. The Republicans sent away the nuns in the middle of the night, and the poor creatures were ordered to take up their abode in the convent of St. Pudentiana. The only thing they thought of was their relic, and that they carried with them.

When the French came to Rome they continued to hold St. Silvester, but permitted the nuns to occupy some rooms near the church. I was in Rome while they were still at my titular church, and went to visit the nuns attached to it. Their guests were asked, "Would you not like to see our relic of St. John?" I said, "Certainly I should; perhaps I shall never have another opportunity." I do not suppose that it had been out of their house for hundreds of years. There is a chapel within the convent which the nuns of St. Pudentiana consider a sacred oratory, and in this they kept the shrine. On examination, I found that there was no part of the head except the back. It is said in the extract I have read to you that the front part of the head is at Rome, but it is the back of the skull merely; the rest is filled up with some stuffing, and silk over it. The nuns have but a third of the head; and the assertion that they pretend to possess the head, which travelers make, is clearly false. I can say from my own ocular inspection, that it is but the third part—the back part—which is the most interesting, because there the stroke of martyrdom fell. I was certainly glad of this fortunate opportunity of verifying the relic. Some time afterward I was at Amiens. I was very intimate with the late bishop, and spent some days with him. One day he said to me, "Would you wish to see our head

of St. John?" "Yes," I replied, "I should much desire it." "Well," he said, "we will wait till the afternoon; then I will have the gates of the cathedral closed, that we may examine it at leisure." We dined early, and went into the chapel of the Blessed Sacrament, where the relic was exposed, with candles. After saying prayers, it was brought, and I had it in my hands. It was nothing but the mask, the middle and back portions being totally wanting. You could almost trace the expression and character of the countenance in the bony structure. It was of the same size and color as the portion which I had seen at St. Pudentiana; but the remarkable thing about it is that there are stiletto marks in the face. We are told by fathers that Herodias stabbed the head with a bodkin when she got it into her hand, and here are the marks of such an operation visible. You could almost say that you had seen him as he was alive. I have not seen the third fragment, but I can hardly doubt that is a portion of the same head, and that it would comprise the parts, the chin and the jaw, because there is no lower jaw in the front part, which is a mere mask. The only other claimant is Genoa, and its relic I have not seen. But this is exactly the portion allotted by Mandeville to that city. I have, however, had the satisfaction of personally verifying two of the relics, each of which comprises a third part of the head, leaving for the other remainder exactly the place which our old traveler allots to it.\*

\* From *Essays on Religion and Literature*. By Various Writers. Edited by H. E. Manning, D.D.

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