

HOLY WEEK.

TUESDAY.

Again did our Lord return to Jerusalem. He wandered not any more at this time into distant towns; He narrowed his wanderings; He was in and out of the holy city; He seemed to hover about the place of his sufferings; He seemed unable to remove far from it; the time was come, and His last few days were spent close to the scene of His sufferings. He was ready for His hour; He kept Himself ready. On this morning He beheld, on His way the fig-tree blasted, dried up to the roots, dried, withered. "And when his disciples saw it, they marvelled, saying, How soon is the fig-tree withered away! Even so does all wither that is not of Christ; even so was Jerusalem to perish; her lofty pinnacles her, palaces, the temple itself, was to come down to the earth, to lie in the dust, "a ruinous heap;" even so, like a tree whose sap was dried up, would all outward show, pomp, splendour, state, magnificence, riches, shrink away and be dissolved. As beneath the roofs of all the vast houses of that vast city there was no fruit, no vast company of faithful men dwelling holily; or, as beneath all the show of worship, all the outward acts of religion, the inner man of the heart was corrupt, wordly, covetous, unbelieving, so the glory of the city was to pass away, and the people of the city to perish.

And might not our Lord, on beholding the withered tree, have thought also upon Himself, in one sense so soon to be like the tree, in another sense so unlike it? Surely on Him the Father's curse was about to fall, for "cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree," and it was His to become "a curse for us." Soon was His holy flesh to turn pale, and give forth its crimson sap and die; soon was it to be laid in the earth, even as a dead tree; as a tree cut down to the roots, never more, as it seemed to man's eyes, to put forth leaves or to bud and blossom. Yet here mark the difference; this vine when cut down, when juiceless and dead, was not to see corruption; this vine in dying bore forth much fruit; this vine was cut down out of the land of the living, not for its own lack of fruit, but for the fruitfulness, the evil fruit, of others; above all this vine was about to rise again, to regain its life, to bud and blossom, to lift up itself to greater glory, and to raise up the trees of the forest which should draw near to it, to bear abundant fruit in others, and to give to others that were dead abundant life.

After speaking to His disciples, who wondered at the rapid withering of the tree, of the power of faith and of faithful prayer, our Lord entered the temple. Behold how He clung as it were to the temple and sought its courts during these awful days. In the temple again He found no new thing, no token for good, no sudden rise of faith, no meekness, no teachableness, no sign of awakening from this dead sleep of unbelief, no moving of the spiritual limbs. Nay, He was met with opposite signs. "By what authority," exclaimed the chief priests and the elders, the blind leaders of the blind, "doest Thou these things?" Our Lord then answered the question of unbelief by asking in return, "The baptism of John, whence was it?" And they durst not tell their thoughts. Then our Lord spoke three parables, that of the father and his two sons; then that of the vineyard, which He so touchingly described the householder sending last of all his son, thinking that the husbandmen who had killed his servants after servant would reverence his son, but "they caught him and cast him out of the vineyard and slew him;" and here also he described the vengeance of the householder on the murderers. Then from the dark sayings, from parables, did our Lord proceed to speak plainly, plainly threatening Israel with destruction plainly warning them of the end of God's favor. He spoke yet a third parable, that of the marriage feast, to which many were bidden but few would come, still further declaring the rejection of the Gospel by the Jews.

Then was He tempted by the Herodians, by the Sadducees, by the Pharisees, all trying to entangle Him in His talk, all bringing the day of their grace the more certainly and quickly to a close, all grieving the soul of the Son of Man and his journey to the cross, by the hardness and impenitence of their hearts. Nor did he withhold his tongue from the

unrighteous leaders of the people. "Woe, woe, unto you," He exclaimed eight times, even in these awful words of warning giving them a last hope; for this threatening of woe might have raised some sudden penitence or remorse, might have made some conscience start or turn.

Yet all was not dark in that hour when words of denunciation were coming from the most loving Saviour's lips. One gleam there was in that bitter day; for he beheld the widow cast in her mite which was her all, and after thus seeing some light in the temple, one deed of love and self-denial, which He greatly blessed, He went out. After this, on the Mount of Olives, He spoke of those things of which He had of late so often spoken; for the last time He foretold the overthrow of Jerusalem, the end of the world, of which that fearful overthrow was but a type. Three parables, that of the ten virgins, of the talents of the sheep and the goats, closed the wonderful sayings of that wonderful and eventful day. Again he withdrew from the city, as though He were not a dweller at Jerusalem, but came to it as one almost rejected, yet too full of love to let it reject Him without lifting up his voice to save. He passed the night at the Mount of Olives.

WEDNESDAY.

Plainly now did our Lord speak to His disciples of His coming suffering and death, for the time drew nigh. Unlike the sons of men He knew the number of His days, and was certified how long He had to live; doubtless this foreknowledge of a death so bitter, and of the hour of bitterness, added greatly to His sorrow, and gave him a foretaste of His woe. In love He told His disciples of the awful scene so near at hand, that such things might not burst upon them unawares, like thunder storms on a summer's day, but that their minds might be prepared, their hearts nerved for the woeful act. "Ye know that after two days is the feast of the Passover and the Son of Man is betrayed to be crucified.

O Blessed Jesus, who didst thus foresee the toil that would be laid for Thee, and didst draw near, like a lamb to the thicket that Thou mightest be caught, merciful art Thou in placing mists before our eyes, so that we see not the full height and breadth and terribleness of many griefs and sorrows that it is our portion to meet. Merciful art Thou in giving us strength for the day when the trials come, O Lord, all Thine own sorrows were known unto Thee; and all such forebodings and fears beforehand as we have, Thou knowest. Assist us in all times when with fearful hearts we see clouds arise; assist us in all times when tribulation has come.

It was now too that the chief-priests and scribes and elders, still further maddened by His words of yesterday, took counsel against Him in the palace of the high-priest Caiaphas the high-priest thus consulting about the great Sacrifice. At first fears of the people damped their counsel. Later in the day was one great dreadful step taken towards the slaying of this Sacrifice. From the side of Jesus one went forth, His own familiar friend whom He trusted, His companion, His follower, His chosen one, His Apostle Judas, Judas Iscariot. He went forth, yielding himself up into Satan's hands, to sell his Lord. He went forth from the pure presence of the Lord Jesus to a den of murderers plotting death. He went forth from the All-holy to the unholy. He went forth the worst idolater of all that have had idols, to do the worst of sin that sinners have ever done, giving up his Lord for such a god as thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued. And this too did the all-knowing Lord know. He knew that for which Judas went forth. It was in itself a bringing near of his death; it was a great step towards the cross; it was a wound from a friend's hand; it was a friend's hand turned into an enemy's, one who had eaten of His bread, to whom He had given sweet counsel, whom he had taught, nourished, blessed with his presence, fed with His words of truth; such an one was His betrayer; and while the traitor was covenanting, the betrayed Master was aware of it. He knew of that sale of His own blood. Awful bitter day to the Son of God! Awful day of the selling of Jesus! The net was spread abroad with cords; soon in the snare of the fowler was the bird to be caught; yea, soon was He purposed to yield Himself to the snare, though

He had the wings of a dove and might have flown away and been at rest.

THURSDAY.

On this day the shadow of death fell more darkly on the holy Jesus; death was very near. But He had work yet to do; He had works of love yet to fulfil, and words of love yet to speak. The nearer His death was the more did his love seem to issue forth. He sent His disciples to prepare the Passover, that feast which through many generations had continued to foretell and to show forth the shedding of His blood. When the feast was prepared, He sat down with the twelve; He gathered his chosen ones around Him for the last time. He was in the midst of His beloved fellowship of Apostles. It was His last feast with them, His last Passover, His last union with them before he suffered. And so He said "with desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer." It was an awful yet blessed hour; the Lamb appointed to be slain was soon to be in the hands of His murderers; and now, before that great scene of woe, He had a little space of stillness and repose; and for this brief calm, ere the storm broke furiously upon Him, He had reserved acts and words that might after His suffering dwell with the force of dying acts and dying words in the hearts of His disciples.

During this Supper He first commended the great grace of humility and reproved His followers for striving among themselves for the highest place; He reproved them in that wonderful act of humility, the washing of His disciples' feet, when He stooped low and humbled Himself before his own servants, and was indeed among them "as he that serveth." Stronger than all words concerning humility was that abasing of Himself before them all. Most marvelous act of lowliness! How did the Lord of glory bow Himself before His creatures, when He took a towel and girded Himself and washed His disciples' feet! "So after He had washed their feet, and had taken His garments, and was set down again, He said unto them, Know ye what I have done unto you? Ye call me Master and Lord; and ye say well for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you."

O Blessed Jesus, teach us to humble ourselves for our brethren's sake, and after Thy example to do them lowly service. Teach us to condescend to men of low estate, to keep watch by the sick, to wait on the suffering, to serve those who require kind service, to shun high places and to be lowly in heart, following Thee in Thy lowliness, and seeking to be conformed to Thy most perfect pattern. Quench all proud and haughty thoughts, all love of earthly honor, all fondness of rule and sway. Even as Thou didst serve, so may we serve those within our reach, seeking to do them good and to treat the humblest of our neighbours as our brethren through Thee.

After this they continued the feast, and our Lord saddened them in the midst of it by saying "one of you shall betray Me." When they sorrowfully began to say unto Him, every one, "Lord is it I?" the Lord pointed out the traitor, the traitor who had already made his bargain, and was now about to deliver the Master whom he had sold. "He that dippeth his hand with Me in the dish, the same shall betray Me." And yet even now He spoke words that were enough to make Judas turn from his evil path and repent. He warned him of his tremendous guilt. He would not let him go forth unwarned; "Woe unto that man," He said "by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It had been good for that man if he had not been born." As if more strongly to warn Judas, to touch his conscience by an act of love, He Himself had dipped the sop and gave it to Judas. Yet Judas was unmoved unchanged: Satan had obtained possession and the son of perdition went out from his Master's presence, from his Master's side, from his Master's feast of love, with those last words of warning ringing in his ears, "That thou doest, do quickly,"—words that showed to Judas our Lord's divine knowledge as if to startle him in the midst of his guilt, by revealing Who it was he was about to deliver up.

(To be continued.)

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