

on both sides, presented a strange scene of bustle and excitement. Day after day, and all day long, the people came and went—the young and the old, the rich and the poor, the whole families together. It seemed as if every beast of burden had been made use of for that time—long-necked camels, dromedaries, and mules—and thousands trudging bravely on foot; over the wide-spreading plain of Jericho—over the grey high hills—issuing from the groves of palm trees every day, and all day long. We fancy we can almost hear the murmur now of that vast multitude—the tramp of many feet, the thousand voices that suddenly are hushed and stilled, and then burst forth afresh, the questions that are asked, the answers that are given, the cries and groans that sometimes are heard as the words of the strange preacher fall on the guilty consciences of the throng—piercing, burning words, like a shower of fiery darts. We fancy we can hear that terrible voice that wakes up every echo, and that, standing in the Jordan stream, with his robe of camel's hair, and leathern girdle, we can see the baptist preaching to the crowds about him—every day and all day long.

Far away the people stretching on every side, swaying to and fro, and clustering together wherever men can cluster. People of all ranks and conditions are there—the hated publican or tax-gatherer, who grinds the faces of the poor; the haughty Pharisee, with his long robes, his stately step, and his proud look; the rough soldier, who has seen many a hard fight, and who boasteth that he knows no fear; the wily lawyer, and the doubting Sadducee. John has a word for all, as they gather round, each man feels the power of the words he utters.

The bright sun is shining over the mountains of Moab, the river on its course casts back its ray, and looks silver; the strips of verdure on the rocks are green and pleasant to the sight, the tall palms cast a cooling sha-

dow, but the wonted quietness is gone. From the grey dawn, crowds have been gathering, and now, though we can hear his voice, we cannot, for the press, come nigh the preacher, but from the people round about we hear strange stories of the baptist. One old man tells how he remembers well the day when with the crowd of worshippers in the outer court of the Temple, he saw Zecharias the priest, the father of the Baptist, come forth, and when every head was bent, and yet no word of blessing heard, he ventured to look up, and saw the aged priest motioning with his hands, but dumb, quite dumb—speechless as the brazen altar. We hear the story of how it afterwards came out that an angel had appeared to Zecharias and foretold the birth of John; and how, when the child was born, and was to be circumcised, the dumb priest had motioned for a writing-table, and had written "*his name is John*;" and how, in that very hour, his tongue was loosed, and he spake as before. The old man remembers all about it, though more than thirty years have passed.

Others can tell us how strange a life the child has led, and how strange a life the man now leads—far away from towns and cities, alone with God; so strange a life, that many have said he must have a devil; but devils do not preach righteousness, John the Baptist does.

We notice a Pharisee, ever loved to have the chief place at the synagogue, to let men know his piety by praying at the corners of the streets, and having Bible texts fastened on his head-dress, but who now is walking with his eyes cast down. They tell us he was wont to boast that the multitude who crowded to John's preaching went but to look on a reed shaken by the wind—that presently he came himself, and stood on Jordan's bank as proudly as in the synagogue on Sabbath days, but that, when he heard the great fiery words of the man of God, he trembled and wept like a child