

The Three Marys

as presented in the Gospels.

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Contents

PREFATORY	2
MARY THE MOTHER OF OUR LORD.	2
THE MISSION OF GABRIEL TO MARY.....	3
MARY'S VISIT TO ELIZABETH.	5
THE MAGNIFICAT.*	6
MARY AT BETHLEHEM.....	9
MARY AND THE SHEPHERDS.	10
MARY IN THE TEMPLE.	11
MARY AND JOSEPH FINDING JESUS IN THE TEMPLE.	14
IN CANA OF GALILEE.	16
(JOHN 2: 1-11).....	16
THE LORD'S MOTHER AND HIS BRETHREN.	18
(MATT. 12: 46-50; MARK 3: 31-35; LUKE 8: 19-21.).....	18
MARY STANDING BY THE CROSS OF JESUS.	20
(JOHN 19: 25-27.).....	20
THE LAST MENTION OF MARY.	22
(ACTS 1).....	22
MARY OF BETHANY.....	23
MARY AND THE DEATH OF LAZARUS.	26
(JOHN 11)	26
MARY ANOINTING THE FEET OF JESUS.	31
(JOHN 12: 1-8.).....	31
MARY MAGDALENE.....	35
MARY MAGDALENE AT THE CROSS AND AT THE BURIAL OF JESUS.....	37
MARY AND HER RISEN LORD.....	41

PREFATORY.

BY "the three Marys" it is not meant that there are not other Marys in the New Testament, only that the three selected — Mary the mother of our Lord, Mary of Bethany, and Mary Magdalene — occupy a specially prominent place. It must indeed be apparent to every reader of the Scriptures that these three were distinctly chosen of God for association with His beloved Son, when in this world, in order to present lessons of grace, devotedness of affection, communion and discipleship; and it is the writer's prayer that others may share with him in the profit and blessing he himself has received through his meditations upon these blessed and holy examples, to the end that the Lord Himself may be more abundantly magnified.

MARY THE MOTHER OF OUR LORD.

WERE it not that all scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, one might almost fear to touch upon the subject of this highly favoured and blessed among women. Another reason has operated, perhaps, to hinder many believers from the study of her privileges and character, and that is the sinful idolatry of which she has been made the object by so many millions of professed Christians. The antidote to this tendency — so grieving to the Spirit of God, and so dishonouring to the Lord Himself — is to be found in the consideration of the notices of this elect vessel which are preserved in the gospels. This is the task which we have been led to undertake, in the hope that we may understand more fully, as taught of the Holy Spirit, the marvellous grace of God in singling out this poor woman for this unspeakable honour; and also the fruits of that grace as displayed in her simple and unwavering confidence in the Lord, and in her devoted and humble life.

It may be remarked that it is only in the gospels of Luke and John that Mary's words and actions are described; she is seen and mentioned in Matthew, and with many details in connection with the birth of Jesus into this world, but beyond this the record is silent. Joseph, indeed, in this gospel is the more prominent, for it was through him that the genealogy of Jesus, as the Son of David, was reckoned. (Matt. 1: 16, 20.) Still it was Mary who had been chosen and prepared of God for the ineffable privilege of becoming the vessel of the introduction of Jesus into the midst of Israel, the One who should save His people from their sins; for, as the evangelist writes, "All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a Son, and they shall call His name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us." This prophecy fulfilled, and the Child born, the bright rays of His glory could not but throw Mary into the shade; and, consequently, in the very next chapter, it is said five times over, "The young child and his mother," not, The mother and her Child. How could it be otherwise, if He that was born was no less than Emmanuel — God with His people? This fact duly appreciated would have quenched

for ever the desire to exalt Mary above her Son; as the Lord Himself taught, in another way, when an admiring hearer exclaimed, "Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked;" for He replied, "Yea rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it." (Luke 11: 27, 28.) It was not the woman, highly favoured as she was, but the woman's Seed who was to bruise the serpent's head, the One in whom all God's counsels were to be unfolded and accomplished. It is He, therefore, God's beloved Son, and not Mary, who is to fill the hearts of God's people with praise and adoration.

THE MISSION OF GABRIEL TO MARY.

When we come to the gospel of Luke, Mary is the prominent figure in the account of the nativity. Of Joseph's exercises there is here no mention; it is only said that Mary was "a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary." (Luke 1: 27.) It was to her, dwelling at Nazareth,* that the angel Gabriel was sent from God. Sitting in the house, as is clear from the words, "The angel came in unto her" — she received the salutation, "Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women." Gabriel, who stood in the presence of God (see ver. 19), was in the divine secret concerning the chosen virgin; and, as is evident from the nature of his greeting, he appreciates the immense favour, together with her exaltation amongst women, which God in His grace had bestowed upon her. His words, indeed, did but express his own delight in communion with the thoughts of God.

*Matthew does not mention that Joseph and Mary were inhabitants of Nazareth before the birth of Jesus: his object is to show the fulfilment of prophecy in the birth of the King of the Jews at Bethlehem, and afterwards he tells us that, having returned from Egypt, Joseph "came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth," etc. The two records supplement one another, each containing what was necessary for the special object in view.

But Mary, when she saw the angel, who doubtless appeared in human form (see Luke 24: 4), "was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be." That is, she reasoned inwardly as to the nature of Gabriel's words, what was their "aim and meaning." We can understand this if we recall her character and position. She was a pious, God-fearing woman, and, whatever her genealogy, would seem to have been in lowly circumstances. Meekness, humility, and faith were manifestly the features of her spiritual life, and she might therefore well be troubled at the saying she had heard, and reason, not with the natural mind as the offspring of doubt, but rather as springing from perplexity of soul, concerning the significance of the angel's address. With divinely-given insight into Mary's feelings, Gabriel first of all calms her mind, and then, in preparation for the marvellous communication he was sent to make, assures her that she has found favour with God.* We say "in preparation" for Gabriel's message, for until the soul is at peace and in liberty divine things cannot be communicated. (Compare Dan. 10: 19.)

*Commenting upon verse 28, another has observed that "the expressions 'found favour' and 'highly favoured' have not at all the same meaning. Personally she had found favour, so that she was not to fear; but God had sovereignly bestowed on her this grace, this immense favour, of

being the mother of the Lord. In this she was the object of God's sovereign favour." It may be added that finding favour with God refers to Mary's spiritual state, while being highly favoured speaks rather of her being God's chosen vessel for the birth of Jesus. But the two things are assuredly connected.

And what a message it was that Gabriel was sent to deliver! "And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a Son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end." (Vers. 31-33.)

It does not fall within our object to expatiate upon the ineffable mystery of the incarnation of our blessed Lord and Saviour, or to call attention to the several titles and glories with which He is here invested, inasmuch as it is Mary herself who is the subject of our meditations. This much, however, may be said, that the glory of His Person is surely contained in the name JESUS, meaning, as it does, Jehovah the Saviour; and, secondly, that all the titles given relate to the earth, and to His exaltation in the earth, as the Son of the Highest, and as the Son of David, who should exercise everlasting sovereignty over the house of Jacob. It is as Heir to the royal rights of David, but David's Lord as well as David's Son, that He is here presented. And let not the reader forget that all these promises await their fulfilment, and that they will be infallibly accomplished by the power of God according to His eternal counsels. The kings of the earth may set themselves and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against His Anointed; but, notwithstanding all the raging of the nations and of their monarchs, God has set in His immutable purposes His King upon His holy hill of Zion; and He will reign until He hath put all enemies under His feet.

When God promised a son to Abraham, Sarah laughed within herself, doubting, not knowing the almighty power of the Promiser. Zacharias had also the difficulty of unbelief when he received from Gabriel the announcement that his wife Elizabeth should bear him a son. Mary replied to the angel, "How shall this be?" But although what was promised must be outside of the order of nature, it was not, as in the cases adduced, distrust that prompted her question. This is seen from the fact that Gabriel is permitted to give a full and complete answer to her inquiry, an answer which reveals two things, the miraculous conception of our blessed Lord, and that the Child so born should be called the Son of God, the Son of God as born into this world, according to the second psalm.* But to strengthen her divinely-given faith, which already existed, Gabriel was commissioned to inform her of God's grace also to her cousin Elizabeth, "for," said he, giving thus the unchanging basis of all belief, "with God nothing shall be impossible." God were not God if this were not so; and hence, too, as the Lord Himself taught, "All things are possible to him that believeth." It was this lesson which Mary had now learnt in her inmost soul, as shown by her response, "Behold the handmaid" (the bondsmaid) "of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word."

*It is important to distinguish between this title and His eternal Sonship, of which John, for example, speaks in his gospel.

And not only had Mary now learnt that with God nothing was or would be impossible, but also, made willing by divine grace, she offered herself, surely only in the power of the Holy Ghost, for the accomplishment of His blessed will, and without any reservation. In all the range of scripture there is no instance of a more exalted faith nor of a more complete submission. She could not be blind to the possible consequences in this world; and indeed we learn from Matthew that she became the object of suspicion and exercise even to Joseph. But faith never reasons and is never perplexed; it simply counts upon God, in the confidence that if He call to any service, or to walk in any path, He will both guide and sustain, whatever the trial or persecution involved. The calm of a soul which reposes in the will of God is unspeakable, and this was the inheritance of Mary at this moment. The favour bestowed upon her was infinite, and not less was the grace which enabled her to accept it with a meek and quiet spirit. In this respect, too, as well as in that of her being the chosen vessel for the birth of Jesus, all generations will call her blessed.

MARY'S VISIT TO ELIZABETH.

Whenever there is a work of grace in souls they are drawn together in the bonds of divine love. So was it with Mary and Elizabeth. Gabriel had revealed to Mary that God had also visited her cousin Elizabeth, and with the sense of what was to be accomplished through herself, whether she understood or not the full import of the communication she had received, she had been made to feel that there was one friend to whom she could pour out her soul. Accordingly she "arose in those days, and went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Juda; and entered into the house of Zacharias, and saluted Elizabeth."

Burdened with her tidings — tidings which told, moreover, of God's faithfulness to His word, and of His unquenchable love to His people — it could not be otherwise than that she should go "in haste." And what thoughts would fill her adoring heart as she sped on her mission! As one of the holy women of Judah, she well knew the scriptures that spake of the coming King and the glory of His kingdom. Such scriptures, for example, as "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth! Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing: for they shall see eye to eye, when the Lord shall bring again Zion. Break forth into joy, sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem: for the Lord hath comforted his people, he hath redeemed Jerusalem" (Isa. 52: 7-9); or again, "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee." (Zech. 9: 9.) The very words the angel had employed could not fail to remind her of these glorious predictions, and to cause her heart to overflow with praise in that she, a humble virgin, should be connected with their fulfilment.

That her visit to Elizabeth was of the Lord is seen from the greeting she received — a greeting, moreover, which must have, in a remarkable manner, confirmed her faith. As soon as Elizabeth heard the salutation of her kinswoman she was reminded of her own condition, and at the same time, filled with the Holy Ghost, she was inspired to proclaim the blessedness of the one whom the Lord had so distinguished by His grace. "She spake out with a loud voice, and said, 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? For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation

sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord."

Before considering Mary's response to Elizabeth, a few observations may be made upon these remarkable words. It will be at once observed that Elizabeth, as "filled with the Holy Ghost," is in entire communion with the mind of God as to Mary. Gabriel had said to her, "Blessed art thou among women," and Elizabeth now says, "Blessed art thou among women," adding, "and blessed is the fruit of thy womb." With her eyes opened by the power of God, she saw as God saw, and pronounces His own estimate upon the one He had chosen for this singular favour. As filled with the Spirit, moreover, she in meekness and humility acknowledged the exaltation of Mary by the grace of God. "And whence," she proceeded, "is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" Herself the object of the divine favour, she yet took the lowest place before the one who was to become the mother of her Lord.

Let the instruction sink deeply into our hearts, that when the Spirit of God is working in souls all envy, strife, and jealousy are banished. Love then flows out unhinderedly, and humility is the fruit of love. Then, after describing the effect upon her of Mary's salutation, she proclaimed a third character of blessedness. Mary was blessed as the object of God's sovereign favour, she was blessed as the vessel for the incarnation of our Lord, and she was blessed on account of her faith — faith which surmounted all obstacles, and reposed upon the almighty power of God. Like Abraham, she staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but "found strength in faith," giving glory to God. She had thus unfalteringly laid hold of God's word, unhesitatingly concluding that what He had promised He would certainly perform. She honoured God in this way, and now she was met with a divine assurance, through the lips of Elizabeth, and there should be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord.

THE MAGNIFICAT.*

*This is a name which was attached to Mary's utterance in the early age of the church — from the Latin word to magnify.

Let these words of Mary be given in their entirety, that the reader may perceive more fully their divine meaning and beauty:

My soul doth magnify the Lord,

And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.

For He hath regarded 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 on them that fear Him
From generation to generation.
He hath showed strength with His arm;
He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.
He hath put down the mighty from their seats,
And exalted them of low degree.
He hath filled the hungry with good things;
And the rich He hath sent empty away.
He hath holpen His servant Israel,
In remembrance of His mercy;
As He spake to our fathers,
To Abraham, and to his seed for ever."

It has been said by a well-known writer that "it is remarkable that we are not told that Mary was full of the Holy Ghost. It appears to me," the writer proceeds, "that this is an honourable distinction for her. The Holy Ghost visited Elizabeth and Zacharias in an exceptional manner. But, although we cannot doubt that Mary was under the influence of the Spirit of God, it was a more inward effect more connected with her own faith, with her piety, with the more habitual relations of her heart with God (that were formed by this faith, and by this piety), and which consequently expressed itself more as her own sentiments. It is thankfulness for the grace conferred on her, the lowly one, and that in connection with the hopes and blessing of Israel." These remarks will help us in our consideration of this striking song of praise — a song which has been well described as "the proper celebration of Israel's joy in the gift of Christ." For while it is the utterance of the feelings which had been produced in Mary's heart by the Holy Ghost, and feelings which were suited and responsive to the distinguishing grace bestowed upon her, Mary herself was lost, so to speak, in her being a type of Israel. (See ver. 54.)

As may be seen at a glance, the song is Jewish in its character; that is, it does not go beyond Abraham and his seed. In this respect it has often been compared with that of Hannah, for she also, without going back as Mary did to God's promises to Abraham, surveys the whole of His dealings with His people, and triumphantly anticipates their complete deliverance, through Jehovah's intervention, as she says, "The adversaries of the Lord shall be broken to pieces; out of heaven he shall thunder upon them: the Lord shall judge the ends of the earth; and he shall give strength unto his king, and exalt the horn of his anointed." Mary, on the other hand, regards the deliverance as already effected — effected in the One who was about to be born — and thus she

says that "God has holpen his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy; as he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever."

Two things will not fail to arrest the attention in Mary's song. First, that she ascribes everything to God; and that, taking the place of nothingness, she celebrates His grace. Concerning these points we cannot refrain from citing the following words, "She acknowledges God her Saviour in the grace that has filled her with such joy; whilst, at the same time, she owns her utter littleness. For whatever might be the holiness of the instrument that God might employ — and that was found really in Mary — *yet she was only great so long as she hid herself, for then God was everything*. By making something of herself she would have lost her place; but this she did not. God kept her, in order that His grace might be fully manifested." May we all give heed to this blessed instruction, inasmuch as it is impossible that grace can have its full sway in our souls if we are not in our true place of nothingness before God.

Entering into these thoughts, the reader will readily understand the language of this song of praise. Whenever there is a real work of the Spirit of God in the souls of His people, their hearts ascend to the source whence their blessing has come. So with Mary; her first thought is the Lord who had visited her with such ineffable grace. "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour." Her individuality was merged for the moment, under the mighty action of the Holy Ghost, in Israel, and thus she rejoices in Israel's God and Saviour. It is true that she speaks of herself in the next verse, and says that God has regarded the low estate of His handmaiden (bondswoman), and that all generations will henceforth call her blessed; but even so it is only as the chosen instrument of the blessing which was coming upon Israel. It was the thought of Israel's salvation out of their low estate which filled her soul when she said, "He that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is His name." For she immediately adds, "And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation," showing, moreover, that it was God's elect Israel that occupied her mind — the Israel that Balaam was constrained to speak of when he said God had not beheld iniquity in Jacob nor seen perverseness in Israel — the Israel, in a word, of God's purpose and according to His thoughts.

The next three verses set forth the principles of God's actings in grace, and the condition of soul requisite for its reception. The proud in the imagination of their hearts, the mighty on their thrones, and the rich, the self-sufficient, cannot stand before a holy God in judgment. It is to the poor that the gospel is ever preached; and thus it is those of low degree whom God exalts, and the hungry whom He fills with good things. The Lord Himself proclaimed the same lesson when He said, "Blessed be ye poor: for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are ye that hunger now: for ye shall be filled. Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh . . ."; and then, turning to the other side, "Woe unto you that are rich! for ye have received your consolation. Woe unto you that are full! for ye shall hunger. Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep." (Luke 6: 20-26.) Far and wide let these solemn words run — encouragement and comfort to the poor, the suffering, and afflicted people of God, and as loud warnings to those who are seeking their satisfaction and exaltation in this world.

Mary concludes her song with the language already referred to, "He hath holpen his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy; as he spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever." Faith is the "substantiating" of things hoped for, and Mary at this moment, dreary

as were the spaces that Israel would have to traverse before these words were fulfilled, surveyed the accomplishment of all God's purposes of grace for His earthly people. Indeed, everything was both secured and established in the person of Him who was about to be born into this world, even as the angels in their praises say in the next chapter, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill [pleasure or delight] in men."

For three months Mary continued with her aged* kinswoman, and then returned to her own house. Scripture draws the veil over the communings of these holy women; but we may be sure that they were helpers of one another's faith and joy in the Lord. The visit ended, Mary went back to her home, "to follow humbly her own path, that the purposes of God may be accomplished." Meanwhile, that home was the one spot on earth that attracted and concentrated the attention of heaven.

*She, with her husband, was well stricken in years.

MARY AT BETHLEHEM.

If God is sovereign in His purposes, His sovereignty is no less displayed in His selection of instrumentalities for their fulfilment. More than seven hundred years before the birth of Christ the prophet Micah had said in the name of Jehovah, "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me, that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been of old, from everlasting." That this was regarded as a prediction of the birthplace of the Messiah, is shown from the fact that it was quoted by the chief priests and scribes in answer to Herod's question where Christ should be born. But Mary's home was at Nazareth in Galilee, and the time was drawing near for the birth of her holy Child; and lo, "it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world [the 'habitable world' — the Roman empire] should be taxed." The effect of this decree was that Joseph (together with Mary, his espoused wife, being great with child), was compelled, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to go up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem. Little did the Roman emperor know what would be the consequence of the thought which had come into his mind. As a writer has remarked, "This act only accomplishes the marvellous purpose of God, causing the Saviour-king to be born in the village where, according to the testimony of God, that event was to take place." And what is so remarkable is, that though the decree was issued, and Joseph and Mary, doubtless with many others, repaired to their city to be enregistered, it would yet appear that the census was not actually made until some time afterwards, "when Cyrenius was governor of Syria." How admirable the wisdom of God, and the perfection of His ways! Joseph must take Mary his wife to Bethlehem, and God constrains the emperor to set the machinery of his empire in motion that Joseph may be compelled to go. What a proof it is that God still holds the reins of government in His hands, and that He turns the hearts of men whithersoever He will! The Christian believes and knows it; and he thus rests in peace in the midst of all the busy activities of men, and amid all the confusion, turbulence, and strife which prevail on every hand.

It was while Joseph and Mary were at Bethlehem that Mary "brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no

room for them in the inn." (Ver. 7.) It is no part of our object to consider the incarnation at this time: we are rather concerned with the personal history of Mary. We venture, however, to offer the reflections of another upon this stupendous event, upon this mystery of mysteries: "The Son of God is born in this world, but He finds no place there. The world is at home, or at least by its resources it finds a place, in the inn; it becomes a kind of measure of man's place in, and reception by, the world; the Son of God finds none, save in the manger. Is it for nothing that the Holy Ghost records this circumstance? No! There is no room for God, and that which is of God, in this world. So much the more perfect, therefore, is the love that brought him down to earth. But He began in a manger, and ended on the cross, and along the way He had not where to lay His head." So it was; and surely, as believers, we are constrained to bow with reverence and adoration in the presence of our God, as we contemplate the manner in which He became "God manifest in flesh," and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor, that we through His poverty might be rich. And while thus prostrate before Him, let us remember that to effect the gracious purposes of His love, to redeem His people, whether Israel or the church, entailed upon Him rejection in life and the cross in death. That Child who lay in the manger was "the object of all the counsels of God, the upholder and heir of all creation, the Saviour of all who shall inherit glory and eternal life." It is no wonder, consequently, that Mary was hidden through all this time; not a word is recorded of what she felt, thought, or said, for in truth she was unseen behind the glory of her Child.

MARY AND THE SHEPHERDS.

If we refer to these pious men, who were elected of God to receive the announcement of the birth of "a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord," it is only because of their connection with Mary's history. It was not with the great of the earth that God was at this moment concerned; but it was with His poor and afflicted people, amongst whom these shepherds were numbered. Divine communications can only be received by those whose hearts have been divinely prepared; and hence we may be confident that these humble men were amongst those that looked for redemption in Jerusalem. (See ver. 38.) Thus it was to these, as they were keeping watch over their flock by night, that the angel was sent to carry them good tidings of great joy, which should be to all (the) people; and to certify their faith a sign was given unto them: "Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger." No sooner had he delivered his message than "suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men" (good pleasure in men).

Leaving the devout reader to meditate upon these words, words which tell at least that all God's purposes of blessing for His people Israel were already realised in the Person of His beloved Son, we must follow the shepherds. With simple faith, without a question as to the truth of what they had heard, they said one to another, "Let us now go even to Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known to us. And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger." What a sight it was that greeted their eyes! They might not have comprehended the full import of what they saw, or the glory of the Child. Still they saw Him, and, it cannot be doubted, with adoring hearts. Not a word is recorded of anything they or Mary or Joseph said. Is it because they were feasting their eyes

upon the Saviour, Christ the Lord, as He lay there in the manger? And yet they must have spoken, for after the statement made concerning their testimony "about the country," and the effect it produced, it is said that "Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart." Combining this with the last clause of verse 57, we gather that Mary was a quiet, meditative, reflective soul. Chosen for such a mission, and with such a charge, it could scarcely be otherwise. With even the feeblest sense of the character of her Child she must have been awed in the presence of God, and speech would be almost incongruous. Man would like to know more of her thoughts as she gazed upon the face of that wondrous Child, the One of whom Isaiah prophesied and said, "His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace;" but great as was the favour bestowed upon Mary, it was not she, but her Son, who was the object of heaven, the object of God's counsels, and the One in whom the glory of God would be upheld, vindicated, and made good even in this world. We can, however, admire the beautiful traits of her character which were so conspicuous in her pious and godly demeanour.

MARY IN THE TEMPLE.

The godly and devout character of Mary and Joseph is testified to by their careful attention, in every particular, to the word of God. Both in respect of the circumcision of the holy Child Jesus, and in Mary's own purification, they were found in exact obedience to the prescriptions of the law (see Leviticus 13), as likewise in the presentation of Jesus to the Lord, "as it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord." Forty days were to elapse before Mary could thus appear in the temple at Jerusalem; and it was during this time that the visit of the wise men from the east, as recorded by Matthew, must have occurred. In that scene, as in the visit of the shepherds, Mary is in the background, and we may surely say that she was there willingly. In communion with God's mind, at least in her measure, she would delight, in the recognition of the coming glory of the One who was "born King of the Jews;" and she would in no wise be astonished when she saw them fall down and worship Him, or when they opened their treasures and presented to Him gifts — gold, and frankincense, and myrrh. It was her joy that she had been the chosen vessel of His birth; but she had thenceforward to learn that to be in relationship and identification with God's Anointed would entail upon her the persecution of the god of this world. The moment God's Man-child was born, the dragon (Satan), who had been waiting for the event, sought to devour Him. Mary, with Joseph, as well as Jesus, became the object of the enmity of the wicked king; but sheltered by divine protection and guidance, when they had to flee into Egypt, and again, after they had returned to the land of Israel, into Galilee to their former home, they enjoyed the inestimable honour and privilege of ministering to Him who was no less than the Son of God.

Recalling these incidents to connect the narrative, we may now consider the scene in the temple. Malachi had written, "The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple," and lo! He had come — "when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law." Jerusalem that day was pursuing her course, her people were buying and selling, attending to their household duties and their daily avocations; their Idumean king, blood thirsty and cruel, miserable and unhappy, but blinding his subjects with his munificence and the splendour of his edifices, was bent as ever upon the gratification of his evil lusts; and all alike

were in ignorance of the wondrous fact that God had visited His people, that the glorious Messiah of whom the prophets had sung, and whose kingdom should extend throughout the earth (see Psalm 72), was already in their midst, and being carried into the sacred precincts of the temple.

But God, whatever the attitude and unbelief of the nation, always secured the acknowledgement of His beloved Son, in whatever character He was presented. So in this instance He had prepared the hearts of a few, those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem, to welcome His Christ; and of these, two had been chosen to behold Him at this time with their eyes. Mary and Joseph had trodden the streets of the city with their precious charge, as any other humble Jewish saints might have done in similar circumstances, and they had entered unobserved and unnoticed into the sacred enclosure, knowing nothing of what God had been doing. But, as the evangelist writes, "There was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon: and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him. And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came by the Spirit into the temple." Here, then, was one, and one under the complete control of the Holy Ghost, whom God had called and qualified to receive His Son, when Mary and Joseph brought in the Child Jesus, to do for Him after the custom of the law.

This wondrous scene may well and profitably occupy our attention before proceeding with our subject; and as we consider it may we remember that we are standing upon holy ground. We read that Simeon "took" Jesus up in his arms; it should be "received him into his arms;" and every reverent soul will at once perceive that this is the more suitable, as, indeed, it is the correct word. He received Him into his arms, we may be sure, from the hands of Mary. What a sight! That pious and devoted mother handing her Child into the arms of the aged Simeon, and Simeon to have the inestimable privilege of receiving into his arms that Child in whom all the counsels of God were to be established and perfected!

And who was that Child? He was the Word become flesh, of whom it is written, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the WORD WAS GOD." (John 1: 1.) He was "the image of the invisible God, the Firstborn of every creature: for by Him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by Him and for Him: and He is before all things, and by ["in"] Him all things consist."* He was the One in whom "all the fulness was pleased to dwell." (Col. 1: 15-19); He was the "Son whom God hath appointed the Heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds . . . the brightness of [the] glory, and the express image of his Person, and upholding all things by the word of his power." (Heb. 1: 2, 3.) On the other hand, as born into this world, He was the Seed of the woman, the Seed of Abraham, and the Son of David. All these glories, and many more, for He was a divine Person who had deigned to become flesh, circle around, and shine out from, that holy Babe whom Mary gave into the arms of Simeon. Let us gaze to the full, and reverently, upon this divine mystery; for the more we gaze, the more will our hearts be bowed with adoration in the presence of God's unspeakable gift, before such unfathomable grace and such knowledge-surpassing love.

*There are three prepositions here used, the force of which may be given in the words of one competent to speak upon this subject. He says, "*En*, in the power of whose Person, He was the One whose intrinsic power characterised the creation. It exists as His creature; *dia*, the instrumental power, *eis*, 'for.' Thus *en, dia, eis*, the characteristic power, active instrument, and end."

Simeon stood before God with THIS CHILD in his arms; and with an overflowing heart he blessed God, and said, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel." All his desires were satisfied, every link with earth was broken as soon as he possessed God's salvation, and he was ready to depart in peace. Like Moses also, yea, beyond the experience of Moses when he stood on Pisgah and saw the land which God had provided for His people, Simeon, with the holy Child in his arms, was at the centre of God's counsels, and thence he looked onward to the time when the Gentiles would be brought into the light, and when Christ would be the glory of His people Israel.

Joseph and the Child's mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of Him, as well they might, for here we only know in part; it is only gradually we acquire and come into the power of the truth we profess to acknowledge. Two things follow. To be associated with Christ in this world brings both blessing and sorrow, and this is here exemplified in Mary. Simeon had "blessed" God, and now he blessed them — Joseph and Mary; and then, addressing Mary, he said, "Behold, this Child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; (yea, a sword shall pierce through thine own soul also); that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed." God thus in tender grace, through His servant Simeon, prepared Mary for her Child's path of sorrow and rejection. And who can doubt that it was chiefly when she stood by the cross of Jesus, and beheld His sorrow, that the sword pierced through her own soul also? How merciful it is in the ways of God that it is only gradually we approach our sorrows, and that we find when they come upon us that they are "lusted with his love"! Mary would never forget these words, but "pondering them in her heart," she would be constantly laying them out before God in her meditations and prayers. But if through her life she had to live under the shadow of the cross, she would find, we may be assured, ample compensation and sustenance in the company of her Son. There would be much she could not understand, but she would certainly rest in the knowledge that Jesus, Jehovah the Saviour, was with her, and hence that, in all the earth, there was no one endowed with such an unspeakable privilege and blessing. For His sake, and from love to Him, she would be enabled to survey the future, and to leave it all in the hands of Him who had chosen her for the path.

The poverty of Joseph and Mary is incidentally seen in the sacrifice they brought in connection with the presentation of Jesus. In Leviticus we read, concerning the law of purifying for a woman who has borne a child: "If she be not able to bring a lamb [for a burnt offering], then she shall bring two turtles, or two young pigeons; the one for the burnt offering, and the other for a sin offering: and the priest shall make an atonement for her, and she shall be clean." (Lev. 12: 8,) Mary was "not able" to bring a lamb; and the Spirit of God thus calls our attention to the fact that our Lord was born in the circumstances of humble life, that His "mind" was, from the outset, yea, before He came to earth, to humble Himself. What mother would not, if she

could, surround her child with every comfort and even luxury? But all was ordered by divine wisdom, and as we consider not only the circumstances of our Lord's birth, but the pathway of Him who had not where to lay His head, we are only the more impressed with His unspeakable grace.

The rites of the temple, together with Simeon's prophetic utterances, were ended, and when Joseph and Mary "had performed all things according to the law of the Lord," they left the temple, went down the steps, and through the temple gates with their precious charge, and "they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth," where they pursued their daily avocations, possessed of a divine secret which no one in Nazareth knew but themselves.

MARY AND JOSEPH FINDING JESUS IN THE TEMPLE.

Twelve years passed by, and concerning this whole period two things only are mentioned. The first is, that "the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him;" and the second is, that "his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover." This is another testimony to the piety of Mary and her husband, and it may be that it is on this account the fact is noted; for it is not even said if Mary took the child Jesus with her on these occasions. Not a word is added to gratify human curiosity; only that is given which is requisite for the object the Spirit of God has in view. All is divinely perfect, because every word of scripture is the expression of divine wisdom; indeed, the fact stated in verse 41 is but the introduction to the incident which follows, and it is this we now proceed to consider, in so far at least as it relates to Mary.

The first two verses will prepare our way — "And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast. And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother knew not of it." It would seem from Jewish records that twelve was the age when Jewish youths were considered sufficiently mature to take upon themselves their individual responsibilities before God. A boy who had reached this age was termed "son of the law," and then first incurred legal obligations.*

*See ALFORD'S Greek Testament, *in loco*, vol. i. p. 418.

Be this as it may, the fact is here given that Joseph and Mary took Jesus to Jerusalem when He was at the age of twelve, and it cannot be without significance that it is especially notified. What transpired at the feast is not recorded; our attention is directed rather to the circumstance that, on the return of Joseph and Mary with the caravan,* Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem. It was but natural that they should have supposed that He was in the company, and that therefore they should have made a day's journey without anxiety. But then, failing to find Him among their, kinsfolk and acquaintance, they turned back to Jerusalem seeking Him. For three days they were anxiously and with distress of heart occupied with their search. This was undoubtedly divinely arranged, for until the "child Jesus" had done His Father's will it could not be that He should be interrupted. At the end of this time "they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions." Let the reader here notice how the Holy Spirit, before recording the words of Mary, calls attention to the wisdom displayed by this

holy Child — wisdom so strikingly manifested, "that all who heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers." How true it is that God delights to occupy us with the perfections of His beloved Son! Mary and Joseph — humble people that they were, though Joseph was the son of David (Matt. 1: 21) — were amazed at the sight, and Mary, with the impulse of a mother's heart, at once interposed and said, "Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing."

*It is said that all who went up to Jerusalem for the feast from the same district travelled together for convenience and security. It is possible that an allusion to this custom is found in Psalm 84: 7.

Before entering upon the reply of Jesus, these words of Mary must be considered. More than twelve years had now passed since the marvellous communications of Gabriel, and almost as long since the prophetic utterances of the aged Simeon. These years, interrupted only by the journey to Jerusalem on the recurring festival of the passover, had been quietly passed at Nazareth in the ordinary duties of domestic life. It is not inconceivable that, whatever the perfections of her Son, ever more manifested with His growth in years, Mary was partially blinded by the naturalness of His daily life, or at least that she was sometimes forgetful of the destiny that awaited her Son. We may not speculate, or go beyond scripture, but there are two things in this address to Jesus which seem very distinctly to justify the above suppositions. The first is the implied reproach conveyed in her words, "Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us?" and the second is her use of the term, in including Joseph with herself, "Thy father." We need not mark these things as failures, though we cannot doubt that they sprang from purely natural feelings and relationships. On the other hand, it is as evident that the manner of her speech was the offspring of her intense affection for her perfect Child.

The answer of Jesus to His mother was the declaration of His consciousness of His divine relationship, together with the announcement that He had come to do His Father's will. Mary had said of Joseph to Jesus, "*Thy father.*" The answer was that He had remained in Jerusalem because, as He said, "I must be about *My Father's business.*" His Father's will was to be the supreme law of His life, and it was His joy to acknowledge it; and in its acknowledgement He fully answered Mary's question and removed at the same time her unconcealed reproach. We cannot be surprised that they "understood not the saying which he spake unto them."

Thereupon we read that "He went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them." His reply to Mary in the temple throws a flood of light upon all these years that came between His first passover and His baptism, because He had by it clearly defined His position. He was hereto be "about his Father's business" and consequently, in being subject to Joseph and Mary, He was doing His Father's will in like manner as when He tarried behind in Jerusalem. There was not, there could not be, any discord between His daily life and what men term the more sacred duties. Every breath, every feeling, every thought, every word, and every deed were but the fruits of His entire devotedness to His Father's will, for He always did the things that pleased Him. (John 8: 29.) What a spectacle passed daily before the eyes of Mary and Joseph in that humble abode at Nazareth!

"His mother," we are told in conclusion, "kept all these sayings in her heart" — the sayings at Jerusalem and the sayings surely at Nazareth; and as she guarded and meditated upon them, we may be certain that the Spirit of God gave her some perception of their meaning, to sustain, to guide, and to comfort her in the coming years. No, of all the women who have ever lived, there is not one who had such a blessed privilege as Mary; she was indeed "highly favoured." But as we write these words we again recall the Lord's reply to the woman who cried out from among the crowd, "Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked." "Yea, rather," He answered, "blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it." This blessedness is open to every one of God's people.

IN CANA OF GALILEE.

(JOHN 2: 1-11)

Years pass away before Mary is again seen in the sacred record. Her last appearance was at Jerusalem, when Jesus was "twelve years old," whither she with her husband had gone to keep the feast of the Passover. Thence they returned to Nazareth, and for at least eighteen years there is no mention either of Jesus or His mother. During all this time in which He was hidden, she also was hidden; it is, or should be, the same with the Christian. Now our life is hid with Christ in God; but when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall we also appear with Him in glory. (See also 1 John 3: 2.) So, in the gospel, the moment Jesus commences His manifestation to Israel (John 1: 31) Mary is once more introduced. But in order to rightly apprehend this and the subsequent appearances of Mary, it should be observed that her personal history is closed. If she is seen or mentioned afterwards, it is either in a typical way, or to be used to furnish some precious lesson in connection with our Lord. She must not, highly favoured as she was, arrest the eyes of God's people when her Son, Jesus, is upon the scene: it is His perfections, His wisdom, His devotedness to the will of His God, His glory, that must occupy the reader, though he may not forget the uniqueness of the relationship in which Mary stood to her Child.

On "the third day," we are told, "there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there: and both Jesus was called, and his disciples, to the marriage." Few can doubt, if at least they have entered into the prophetic teaching concerning the future restoration of Israel, that this whole scene is emblematic. The statement that it was on the third day that the marriage took place plainly points to this, whether by the third day is understood the period of blessing (and judgment, if the purging of the temple is added) which follows upon the two days of testimony — that of John the Baptist, and that of Jesus Himself — recorded in John 1; or that it signifies, as so often, resurrection, and thus shadows forth the fact that the blessing of the earthly people, even as that of the heavenly, can only be established in resurrection. To comprehend the symbolical character of this marriage, a marriage which, while it actually took place, was selected for this purpose, is to possess the key to the narrative. It is necessary to say this much because men, and even Christians, have been betrayed into the discussion concerning the Lord's personal conduct to Mary on this occasion, forgetting, in their human thoughts, the glory of the One who manifests here, as everywhere, His perfection in every relationship in which He stood.*

*One well-known Bible has actually falsified the translation of verse 4 in order to conceal the real character of the words which Jesus spoke to Mary. It is given as if it were, "What is that to me and thee?" In the words of a writer, this "is not a mistake, because it is a wilful misrepresentation." A solemn, but a true, accusation!

We read that "when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto him, They have no wine. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come. His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it." (Vers. 3-5.) The following remark of another will help to elucidate the meaning of this scripture: "At the feast (marriage) He would not know his mother: this was the link of His natural relation with Israel, which, looking at Him as born under the law, was His mother, He separates Himself from her to accomplish blessing." This will serve to explain the typical nature of this scene to which allusion has been made. And truly it was so, that, if Jesus was born of a woman, born under the law, He had to die out from under all these relationships, having perfectly glorified God therein, and having redeemed those who were under the law by being made a curse for them, before He could effectuate Israel's blessing. The corn of wheat had to fall into the ground and die if it were to bring forth much fruit.

But there is another thing to be remembered. Jesus had already communicated to His mother, as we have before seen, that He must be about His Father's business; and having come to do His will, He did it at every step in communion with the Father, whether as to time or manner. As He Himself said, "The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise," etc. (John 5: 19-20.) It was impossible, therefore, for Him to receive a suggestion as to what He should do from Mary; and even by the making it Mary was intruding into a province which was exclusively confined to the Father and the Son. That what she said was the prompting of kindness, and that it was, at the same time, expressive of her belief in the power of Jesus, can scarcely be denied; but in the region of Christ's entire and perfect devotedness no voice could be heard but His whose will He had come to do. This will explain to us the words, "Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come."*

*Commentators are sorely perplexed as to whether these words contained a rebuke. What has been said above will suffice for the answer: it may, however, be added that if a rebuke, it was given in the manner which would best serve to make the desired impression upon Mary's heart.

That the words of Jesus to His mother had their purposed effect is clear from the fact that she attempted no reply, and that she still counted upon the interposition of Jesus and the display of His power; for she said to the servants, "Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it." This is exceedingly beautiful; for if Mary had been tempted out of her proper place by her intense affections, and perhaps by her desire to see her Son publicly acknowledged, she, immediately the Lord had spoken, resumed her place of retirement, even while looking for some outshining of His more than human glory (ver. 11), and bidding the servants to render to Him unquestioning obedience. The conciliation of her maternal affections with her faith in Jesus as the One who should be called the Son of the Highest, and the Son of God, must have been, in the routine of daily life as she beheld Jesus eating, drinking, and sleeping, ever a difficult task; but God Himself was watching over her, and was daily opening her heart to the needed instruction even

as at this marriage at Cana of Galilee. Her concern at the deficiency of the wine was more than removed, as she remained a silent spectator of the subsequent proceedings, and she therefore enjoyed the inestimable privilege of witnessing this beginning of miracles which Jesus did, when He manifested forth His glory, and His disciples believed on Him. Any putting forth of what is divine is a part of the glory of God, which is the display of what He is, and consequently turning the water into wine by omnipotent power was this; and the effect was that His disciples believed on Him. They had received Him before, however feeble their faith, but now their faith was confirmed, as Mary's also must have been.

Jesus having accomplished His mission in Cana of Galilee, went down to Capernaum, He, and His mother, and His brethren, and His disciples; and they continued there many days.*

*It would seem from this scripture, and especially from Mark 2: 1, that Mary had removed from Nazareth to Capernaum. It is also probable, for he is not mentioned after Luke 2: 48, that Joseph was now dead, and this may have led to the removal. Nothing hangs upon either of these conjectures, although in regard to the latter one can readily perceive that there might be divine reasons for the death of Joseph before Jesus entered upon His public mission.

THE LORD'S MOTHER AND HIS BRETHREN.

(MATT. 12: 46-50; MARK 3: 31-35; LUKE 8: 19-21.)

From a comparison of the first two scriptures it would seem that the incident they contain, which again brings Mary to our notice, took place at Capernaum. Here at this moment the Lord was entirely engaged in His blessed ministry, and so greatly were the crowds attracted to Him, that He and His disciples "could not so much as eat bread." His "friends," either in their concern for Him, or inconvenienced by what was going on, "went out to lay hold on him: for they said, He is beside himself." (Mark 3: 20, 21.) It is this incident which explains the occurrence now to be considered; for in Mark's gospel it follows almost immediately upon it. Again, then, we find Him diligently pursuing His divine mission, and "the multitude sat about him" (Mark), and "while he yet talked to the people" (Matthew), "behold, his mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to speak to him;" but, as we gather from Luke, they "could not come at him for the press," that is, the crowd. Then, "standing without, they sent unto him, calling him," as we learn from Mark. Word was thus passed into the inner circle of His audience that our Lord was wanted by His mother and brethren; and thereon, following the account in Matthew, one said unto him, "Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee."

At first it may seem strange, after the lesson which Mary had been taught at Cana, that she should have ventured thus to interrupt the Lord in His service. It can only be understood in the light of the incident, already referred to in Mark 3: 20, 21. Although it had been revealed to Mary who and what Jesus was, it could not but be that she had devoted natural affections; and surely these would be both intensified and augmented as she witnessed His pure and holy life, a life wherein might be seen perfect love to God and man, divine and earthly claims (for He was subject to Joseph and Mary as a Child) adjusted. That Mary did not see all the fragrance and beauty of the life of her Son may well be imagined, but what she did behold could not fail to

make Him increasingly the absorbing object of her heart. When therefore she saw Him yielding Himself, without any consideration of self or ease, to His service, following it day by day, and never, in any, even the slightest, degree, sparing Himself, but unweariedly, morning, noon, and night, seizing every opportunity to be about His Father's business, she must have been, in so far as she was governed by her natural affection, alarmed for His sake. It is only thus that the message that she desired to speak with Him can be accounted for or understood.

Before considering the Lord's reply, it will be profitable to point out a characteristic of divine wisdom which is here displayed. Failures on the part of the Lord's disciples, and expressions of the enmity of the carnal mind, are often recorded in the gospels, and yet all these are immediately turned to divine account, either for calling attention to some trait of glory in the Person of Christ Himself, or to teach some valuable lesson of divine truth. Nothing more clearly proves that God is behind everything, that He uses all for the accomplishment of His own purposes, whether of grace or judgment. So is it with Mary's interruption of our Lord's address as here recorded. The parables of Matthew 13 make it clear that the Lord had reached a crisis in His ministry; and it is not too much to say that they could not have been uttered before He had broken off His connection, by His teaching, with the Jewish nation according to the flesh. It is this very thing which the Lord takes occasion to do from Mary's message. How divinely perfect is both His wisdom and also the word in which it is enshrined! And who but a divine Person could have foreseen everything, and made it subservient to His own objects!

The answer of the Lord to His mother and His brethren is worthy of our most devout attention: "Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother." (Matt. 12: 48-50.)

Although we are mainly concerned in our meditations with the personal history of Mary, it is not altogether possible to pass over the profitable instruction of this incident. As to Mary herself, the lesson is very much the same as that given to her at Cana of Galilee. Engaged as the Lord was in doing the will of God in His blessed service, He could not allow an interruption even from His mother according to the flesh. In His devotedness to His Father's "business," He had nothing to do with her. (See John 2: 4.) And herein we are permitted to see Him as the true and perfect Levite. When Moses, before his departure, blessed the tribes of Israel, he said of Levi: "Who said unto his father and mother, I have not seen him; neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor knew his own children: but they have observed thy word, and kept thy covenant." (Deut. 33: 9; see also Ps. 69: 8.) How blessedly is all this exemplified in Christ in the scene under our consideration! He was for God wholly and entirely, and thus outside of all the claims of natural relationship. He was indeed the Leader of His people in every path in which He calls upon them to walk. (See 1 John 2: 6.) In like manner He fulfilled God's thought of the Nazarite, inasmuch as in all the days of His separation He was holy unto Jehovah; for while His Nazariteship is maintained now in another way, and in another condition, for in that He liveth, He liveth unto God, He was absolutely for God in all His earthly pathway.

But there was, as indeed already mentioned, another significance. The close of Matthew 11 shows that He had now been rejected, and that God's elect had set aside the nation which would not receive their Messiah. If the blessings of grace were now hid from the wise and prudent, God

had revealed "these things" unto babes, and Jesus could praise the Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for the exercise of His sovereignty according to His eternal counsels. Henceforward therefore, as it was now revealed, "All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him." When the Lord thus said, in reply to one who told Him that His mother and His brethren wished to speak with Him, Who is my mother, and who are my brethren? it was the declaration that His natural ties with the Jewish people were no longer owned. Hence it is, as we may expect, that we find Him in the next chapter, going forth as a sower to produce fruit, for He had indeed come to seek fruit, and He found none.

Together with this we learn that He had formed His most intimate ties with His disciples, for stretching forth His hand towards them, He said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father who is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother. What precious grace He thus displayed, declaring before all His entire identification with that poor and feeble remnant who were following Him with such halting steps, and who yet, through His care and support, were continuing with Him in His temptations! Doing the will of His Father, and they were doing it in listening to His call, they were brought into the blessed circle of which He was both the centre and the Head, and in which He found His delight. (Ps. 16: 3.) We may yet see how tenderly He cared for Mary when His service was over, and this, too, was a part of His perfection as man on the earth; but it is none the less true that He owned as the closest of all ties those which knitted Him to the children God had given Him. (Isa. 8: 18.)

It may surely be observed that in this also He is our perfect Example. How many of us fail to adjust the claims of God and of His people with family ties! To be without natural affection is a given sign of the last and perilous times; but if it become absorbing, or if it be elevated beyond love to the brethren, and assume the supreme and governing motive of our lives, we could not be in the spirit of these words of our blessed Lord. If, however, Christ himself possess our hearts, we shall view those that are His in the light of His own affections, and being thus in the truth of the assembly, our families and our households will occupy their true place. May our hearts be enlightened by these gracious words which fell from our Lord's lips on this occasion!

MARY STANDING BY THE CROSS OF JESUS.

(JOHN 19: 25-27.)

WHEN the aged Simeon held the infant Jesus in his arms, he said unto Mary, "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; (*yea, a sword shall pierce through thine own soul also,*) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed." We have italicised the words which referred especially to Mary, and which surely found their fulfilment in the scene contained in this scripture. Whether she had followed Jesus to the cross is not said, nor whether she had witnessed the mocking insults and buffetings He had received when before His judges. A veil, as far as Mary is concerned, is drawn over her feelings, her suspense and agony, during the dark night of His betrayal. Although the sword must have pierced through her inmost heart during the night and day that succeeded the Passover, it is with the Lord Himself, and not with Mary, that the Spirit of God is concerned. It is His attitude,

His demeanour, His meekness, His patience and humility, His words that we are called upon to contemplate. But now that His sorrows and sufferings are drawing to a close, the veil is lifted for one brief minute, that we may behold Mary at the cross, or rather, let it be said, that we may behold the perfection of Jesus in His care for Mary, now that the will of God has been accomplished in His service on the earth. Others are with Mary, her sister, Mary, the [wife] of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene; but it is to Mary and to the beloved disciple who was "standing by" that the Lord's words are addressed. We may not conjecture where the word of God is silent; still we may surely repeat that Mary could not gaze upon the crucifixion of her holy Son without unutterable agony — without having her heart rent by the harrowing spectacle. She had watched Him for more than thirty years; she could not but have been sensible of much of the moral fragrance and beauty of His devoted life, and she must have had some glimpses, at least, of the glory of His person. And now it was her lot to behold Him rejected, insulted, outraged, and crucified! That divine support was ministered to her, while passing through such a fiery trial, we may be assured; but none the less, it must have been with a bursting heart, that she watched Him upon the cross, and saw the fiendish delight of His enemies in the realisation of their wicked ends.

We may not, however, linger upon reflections such as these, neither would we have ventured to make them, except to enhance our appreciation of the tenderness and care of Jesus for Mary in her sorrow. His cup had now been drained, for we read immediately that "Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished;" and hence, knowing also what was passing in Mary's heart, He was at leisure to turn to her with words of solace and consolation. Was she in the darkness of desolation in these moments of her supreme trial? The light was at hand to dispel the gloom, and to assure her that the One on whom she had been looking with such unspeakable sorrow understood her grief; for He opened His lips and said, when He saw His mother, and the disciple standing by whom He loved, "Woman, behold thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother. And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home."

In meditating on these words, attention may be called to the fact that the evangelist is led to write the word "mother," while Jesus addresses her as "woman." Mary *was* the mother of Jesus, and this favour from God led Gabriel to salute her as blessed among women. But, as we have seen, natural ties could not be acknowledged as constituting any claim upon a life of devoted and perfect Nazariteship. And now that the Lord's death was at hand, even this tender and intimate tie would be ended, ended by His departure from the scene in which He (in incarnation) was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death; and yet it is at this moment that the Holy Spirit reminds us that she was the mother of Jesus. It teaches, beyond all contradiction, that the honour which God bestowed upon Mary shall never, *in its own sphere*, be taken away. The error, and the deadly error, has been to transfer the honour from earth to heaven, and thus in effect to exalt her even above God's beloved Son.

There are two things in these words of our Lord which may be plainly apprehended. In the first place, He gives to Mary in her bereavement consolation and an object. The beloved disciple who knew the Lord's mind as none other could have done (for he had laid his head upon the Lord's breast) was henceforth to be as Mary's son; and Mary might take him to her heart in a new way as given to her by the Lord Himself. In fact, it was a precious legacy of His heart's affection — the greatest solace He could minister to her in the circumstances. Secondly, He transferred

His own earthly relationship to John when He said, Behold thy mother; and He thus singled out the disciple whom He loved for the fulfilment of all the loving responsibilities which such a relationship involved. Mary, in a word, was committed by the Lord to John's care, who henceforward was to tend her, and provide for her with filial affection. The Lord knew what was in the heart of each, and it was according to His knowledge of, and love for each, that He committed them. thus to one another, and thus bound their hearts together for the remainder of their earthly pilgrimage.

THE LAST MENTION OF MARY.

(ACTS 1)

THE beloved disciple, in obedience to the expressed desire of the Lord ere He bowed His head, and delivered up His spirit,* had taken Mary unto his own home. From that moment, except for one brief record, she disappears from our view. Neither at the burial of the body of the Lord, nor at the garden on the resurrection morn, is she seen; but after the Lord's ascension, which the apostles had beheld (see Acts 1: 1-11), when they had returned unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, they went up into an upper room, where the apostles abode; and in this connection we find the final appearance of Mary in the sacred record. It says, referring to the eleven, "These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and *Mary the mother of Jesus*, and with his brethren."†

*The reader will remember that in John 10, Jesus had said that He had power to lay His life down, and hence it is that, in accordance with this statement, it is here written that He "delivered up" His spirit — as One in full control over it. We are thus permitted to gaze upon Him in this act as completing His holy life of obedience, glorifying the Father, and finishing the work which He had given Him to do.

†From the next verse it appears that an hundred and twenty were finally assembled; but until the thirteenth verse the apostles alone are introduced — for the reason that they only were the Lord's appointed witnesses.

The specific mention of Mary the mother of Jesus as forming one of this company of disciples is of great significance.*

*Alford reasons that the word "and" prefixed to Mary gives eminence to *one* among those previously mentioned." This, is an entire mistake, as the remarks [below] will show.

There is no doubt that our attention was intended to be arrested by this special mention of Mary's name; and the object of it is to teach that Mary had now understood WHO it was who had deigned to become her Son after the flesh, that, together with the light which had entered her soul concerning His death and resurrection, as also concerning His glory at the right hand of God, she had now taken her place, and become identified with His disciples here upon the earth. She would not value one whit the less the ineffable privilege which had been accorded to her in having been the mother of Jesus, nor would she cease to be the highly-favoured and blessed

among women; but now, with faith in her glorified Lord, and numbered among the excellent of the earth in whom was all His delight, her natural feelings and affections would be lost in adoration and praise. She had been the elect vessel for the birth of Christ into this world; she had now become one of His humble followers and disciples, one of that blessed company who were so soon to be formed into God's habitation through the Spirit. As the Lord taught the seventy, it was a greater thing to have their names written in heaven than to be the vessels of His power in conflict with the enemy. In like manner it was a greater thing for Mary to be a living stone in God's spiritual house (as on Pentecost she became), built up upon Him who is the Living Stone, chosen of God and precious, than to have been the mother of her Lord upon earth.

It may be added that all her children became also believers in Jesus. They likewise were numbered with God's elect, and received grace to confess His name and to be identified with His own in that new and heavenly company. Alike with Mary their mother, they were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, and were thus manifested in time as His people. She and they alike would henceforward understand that it was more blessed to hear the word of God and to keep it, than to have been associated with Jesus, during His earthly-sojourn, in intimate natural relationships. To exalt Mary, therefore, at the expense of her glorified Lord is to be blind to the plainest teaching of scripture, and to pervert the whole character of Christianity.

MARY OF BETHANY.

IF Mary, the mother of our Lord, was blessed among women in that she was chosen to be the vessel for the introduction of Christ into the world, Mary of Bethany occupied almost an equally favoured place. She was a member of that well-known household of three, of whom it is said, "Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus;" and it would seem that the Lord sometimes sought retirement, and surely refreshment, in the midst of these attached disciples. They loved Him because He had first loved them, and their simple and devoted affection cheered His heart amid the deepening gloom of His rejection. Of these three, Mary was the one who most fully answered to His mind, and entered into communion with His thoughts. This is certainly true of her, as compared with Martha; and it can scarcely be doubted, although little is said of Lazarus, that also she excelled him in single-eyed devotedness to her Lord. But whether Mary, Martha, or Lazarus, all was of grace, and the failures of Martha, as well as the excellencies of Mary, are adduced to teach precious lessons of warning and guidance for God's people in all ages. It is however especially with Mary that we are concerned in these meditations, even if it is necessary to consider her in connection with her sister and her brother, in order rightly to appreciate her spiritual features. She is only mentioned by name in Luke 10 and John 11, 12; but Matthew and Mark both preserve the record of her anointing the Lord with the costly ointment on the eve of His apprehension and death.*

*The reader will readily discern that a change takes place in this gospel at verse 17. Thereafter Christianity is introduced (vers. 21, 22), and, as a consequence, the remnant according to the election of grace appear. Mary and Martha belong to this new company.

In Luke 10 Mary is first introduced to our notice, and in a very simple manner. Immediately after the parable of the good Samaritan we read, "Now it came to pass, as they

went, that he entered into a certain village: and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet and heard his word." (Vers. 38, 39.) Before entering upon the significance of this attitude of Mary, a word may be given to the connection of the narrative. The good Samaritan had bound up the wounds of the man he had found half dead, pouring in oil and wine; he had set him on his own beast, taken him to an inn and made all necessary provision for him until he should return; and now we learn from Mary's occupation what should be the diligent service of the saved soul in the interval, that hearing the word of Jesus is indeed the good part which shall not be taken away.

An evident contrast is intended by the way in which the two sisters are brought to our notice. Martha received Jesus into her house — and she had a sister, who also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word. The word "also" points to this contrast. It might well be that Martha, was the elder sister, and that, as indeed it says, it was her house; still it could not be doubted for a minute that Mary associated herself with Martha in the Lord's reception. If this were so, the word "also" will now reveal its force; that is, it will signify that Mary not only received Him, but that she *also* sat at His feet and heard His word. Two classes of souls are thus portrayed, those who "receive" the Lord as Saviour, and there rest, even if they render whatsoever service they may deem best, and those who, after they have received Him, press onward, with purpose of heart, to learn His mind, and to become acquainted with Himself. Like David, it is all their desire, and this they seek after, to behold the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in His temple, and thus delighting themselves in the Lord, He grants to them the desires of their hearts. It will be profitable therefore if we endeavour to unfold this action of Mary which is here described.

First, then, she sat at the feet of Jesus. The word to convey this is a strong one, and would seem to show that this was her habit when she had the opportunity. But it is to her sitting that our attention should before all be directed. Of the demoniac it is said that the people found him "sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in his right mind." The very attitude therefore betokened that every question for Mary's soul had been settled, that, if we give the full christian interpretation, she had peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, that she was delivered from the power of Satan, and all that through which Satan acts to keep souls in bondage; and thus at leisure from self in liberty of soul, through the power of the Holy Ghost, she was free to be occupied with the Lord alone. Not that Mary had yet entered upon the enjoyment of these blessings, in the full christian sense; but she had Christ Himself, and in having Him she had everything. Her heart therefore was at rest, yea, she was abundantly satisfied, and He at whose feet she sat was everything to her. With an overflowing heart she could have said, "I am my Beloved's, and his desire is towards me."

Another thing is comprised in her attitude. Sitting at His feet proclaimed that she had become His disciple. Thus Paul, speaking to the Jews in Jerusalem, reminds them that he had been brought up in the city "at the feet of Gamaliel," and had been "taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers," etc. (Acts 22: 8.) It is not all Christians, as before said, who become disciples; and, on this account, we should mark well this position of Mary. And it adds increased significance to it, if we adopt the reading, preferred by most, "at the feet of THE LORD." It is remarkable to find the Spirit of God thus calling our attention, in this narrative, to the claims of Jesus as Lord, by giving us an example of one whose whole soul acknowledged them, and who, by sitting at His feet, owned Him in this title of absolute supremacy. It is a

blessed moment for any soul when that point is reached, when He is enthroned in the heart as supreme, when His will becomes the only law of our daily lives, because we understand His word, "If ye love me, keep my commandments."

But Mary was sitting at the feet of the Lord to hear His word. This was the one thing the Lord delighted in; again and again He had cried, If any man has ears to hear let him hear (see also Rev. 2 and 3), and now He has found one who had received the grace of the hearing ear, and whose heart had been prepared for the divine communications which He had to make. Speaking to His disciples He said, Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth; but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you. (John 15: 15.) This will help us to understand the nature of His discourse with Mary. And with what delight the Lord would impart these heavenly things to one who was ready through grace to be thus instructed. Amidst the hearts "waxed gross," ears which were "dull of hearing," and eyes which were closed, that surrounded Him on every hand, it must have been an unspeakable refreshment to His soul to meet with this yearning soul who desired to hear His words! And with what holy awe, and responsive joy on her part would she listen as He spoke to her of His and the Father's things. The Father who sent Him had given Him a commandment, what He should say, and what He should speak (John 12: 49); and it was Mary's ineffable privilege to listen to the message which the Father had given to the Son to deliver. (Cp. Isa. 50: 4.)

The word, moreover, which He spake was the revelation of Himself; for when the Jews said, Who art Thou? He answered, Altogether that which I also say to you (New Translation); that is, His words perfectly expressed Himself. But we have also to remember that the Father was revealed in and through Himself, His words and works. As He said to Philip, He that hath seen me hath seen the Father. Not that we are to suppose that Mary understood all this, for the Spirit was not yet because that Jesus was not yet glorified. We may, however, the more fully comprehend, from the consideration of what was contained in His utterances, how immensely blessed Mary was in being permitted to sit at the feet of her Lord; and we ourselves might well be encouraged to follow her example. By so doing we shall both delight His heart and find ourselves in the place of untold and unfathomed blessing. It would be proved to be the secret of all spiritual growth, as well as of delighting in the Lord Himself, and in heavenly things.

If we now consider for a moment Martha's interruption, it will but enhance our appreciation of the Lord's estimate of Mary's occupation with Himself. Martha was cumbered about much serving, serving in her own way, and, as she thought, in a manner befitting herself as the hostess of such a Guest. She desired to give to Him, rather than receive from Him, to entertain Him according to her own thoughts of hospitality; and it did not please her that Mary did not join her in this service. She therefore came and said, "Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me." The Lord loved Martha, as we know; and we may be sure that she loved the Lord. If she had not, she would scarcely have ventured to speak to Him in this abrupt, if not imperious, way. Think of it, O reader, that the Lord of life and glory sat in that abode at Bethany as a human Guest, and that, in His infinite condescension and grace, He permitted Martha to speak to Him thus, and to expect Him to sit quietly in the room for her convenience! Nay, that He allowed her to make the implied rebuke that He was not considerate in detaining Mary at His feet! Ah! His answer, brimming over with

His infinite tenderness and grace, could not but open the eyes of Martha to the character of her address: "Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things; but one thing is needful, and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her."

Little more need be observed in connection with this scene, as the Lord's own words explain themselves. The "many things" may have to be attended to *in their place and time*; but even then, if we are in the Lord's presence, and taking them up for Him, they need not cause us care or trouble. But the point here is that Mary had "chosen that good part," and that good part was sitting at the feet of the Lord and hearing His word. What she received that day was eternal in its character, and hence could not be taken away from her. Together with the rising of the sun on the next day Martha's household cares, while in her present frame of mind, would recommence; but Mary would awake with heaven in her soul, because Christ filled her heart. All her future path would be illumined by His presence and the enjoyment of His love, and she would meet her daily responsibilities all the better, more according to God, in that, receiving them from the hands of her Lord, she would discharge them in His name, while her heart would overflow in thanksgivings to God. Martha is doubtless a type of a large class; but let it never be forgotten that the Lord has for ever set His seal of approbation upon the good part which Mary, and all who follow in her steps, have chosen.

MARY AND THE DEATH OF LAZARUS.

(JOHN 11)

IN the Gospel of Luke there is no further mention of Mary or Martha; and it is only from the Gospel of John that we learn that they had a brother, and that, as it would seem, he formed part of the highly-favoured household at Bethany. This we judge to be clear from verse 4, where it says, Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus. In verse 1 it is only said, "Now a certain man was sick, named Lazarus, of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha." The three are so grouped together in verse 4 as the objects of the Lord's affection, and they were evidently so knit together also, as seen from the grief of the sisters in their bereavement, by such tender love one to the other, that the conclusion is forced upon us that they formed one family and one household. It should likewise be remarked that the typical teaching of the chapter circles mainly around Lazarus, for he who runs may read that he sets forth Israel in a future day, when, as Daniel teaches, "many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake" — indicating doubtless the moral resurrection of the remnant of Israel in a future day, of which the raising of Lazarus in our chapter was a type or figure. Into this however we do not enter on this occasion, as our concern is chiefly with Mary, the sister of Lazarus; but the three, Martha, Mary and Lazarus, are so bound up together in the narrative that it will be necessary to consider Mary in the relations in which she was found; for indeed it is through these relationships and the circumstances of the moment that her character is displayed.

The prominence of Mary in the mind of the Spirit, even before the narrative commences, is seen from verse 2: It was that Mary which anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick. It is a loving reference to this act of Mary, teaching her how acceptable it was before God, that its fragrance after the lapse of sixty years*

was still rising up before His throne. After this touching and fragrant parenthesis, the history begins with the statement that the sisters of Lazarus sent unto Jesus saying, "Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick." It was clearly no common sickness, but one that awakened in the hearts of Mary and her sister the gravest forebodings. If so, they were not without resource, for they knew Him who had cast out the spirits with His word, and healed all that were sick, and to Him they turned in their extremity. A common sorrow constrained a common appeal. It is often so with the people of God, and even with families, and the united supplication is ever fraught with richest blessing through the realisation of a common dependence, and being kept before God with a longing expectancy. In the case before us, the response to the prayer was delayed, and delayed for purposes of deeper blessing, as the Lord, by no means dimly, indicated when He said, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby." (Ver. 4.) These words afford the key to the otherwise mysterious statement that when Jesus had heard therefore that Lazarus was sick, He abode two days still in the same place where He was. (Ver. 6.)

*If the Gospel of John were not written before A.D. 90, as is generally thought, it was sixty years since the Lord ascended up to heaven.

There were indeed, we may perhaps venture to say, three reasons for the Lord's delay in responding to the sister's appeal. The first is contained in the scripture cited (ver. 4): had the Lord gone at once and healed Lazarus, glory might still have been brought to God; but God was about to render a striking testimony to the Person of His beloved Son through resurrection, and hence He did not interpose until Lazarus was dead. Calling Lazarus out of his tomb was, while pre-eminently for the glory of God, the manifest witness that Jesus was the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection of the dead.* The second reason is found in the position which the Lord, though the Son, occupies especially in this gospel. He never spoke or acted excepting at the will of the Father (John 5: 19; John 12: 49; John 14: 10); and thus He remained where He was until it was the Father's will that He should go to Bethany. Much as He loved these sorrowing sisters, He was not governed by His affections, but by the Father's will, to which He ever, in His perfection, entirely, and at all times, responded. Finally, it cannot be doubted that the delay was used to exercise the hearts of the sisters, and to prepare them, each in her measure, for the bright outshining of the glory of God (see ver. 40), which they were to behold in the raising of their brother. This is one of the secrets of the Lord's ways with His people. They cry to Him, and seemingly He does not hear. But He does hear, and if the succour sought be not instantly vouchsafed, it is only that He would first produce through exercise the state of soul suited for the blessing He is about to bestow. His way, surely we would all confess, is ever perfect, and it only needs that, with the knowledge of His love, we should repose in Him with unshaken confidence in all circumstances.

*This phrase is better rendered "by resurrection of the dead:" it is so constructed to include the raising of the dead by the Lord Himself, and His own resurrection.

Passing over the instruction the Lord gave to His disciples in connection with the death of Lazarus, and His care for them in seeking to establish their faith (vers. 7-16), we read that when Jesus came to Bethany He found that Lazarus had lain in the grave four days already. When He raised the daughter of Jairus she had only just died; the son of the widow of Nain was being

carried to the grave when the Lord met him and restored him to life; in the case of Lazarus death had possessed its prey for four days, in order that there might be a still more significant display of divine power in his resurrection. Another thing was that a number of Jews had come from Jerusalem to comfort Martha and Mary concerning their brother, and were thus ready to be eyewitnesses of the power of Jesus in raising the dead.

In the next place our attention is called to a contrast, once again, between Martha and Mary. Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming went and met Him: but Mary sat [still] in the house. The exercises they had passed through while waiting for the Lord's response to their message are not described in words; but we may surely discern the effect of their exercises in their contrasted conduct. Martha had doubtless been tried as well as Mary, for the fact that they used the same words (vers. 21, 32) when they came into the Lord's presence reveals that they had been perplexed by the Lord's delay, and that they had spoken together of it, while bowed down in suspense and sorrow; but Martha had not yet reached the blessed end of the trial, for she is marked still by haste and, we may add, impatience. Mary, on the other hand, had learnt her lesson, and thus she could calmly await the call of her Lord. Her sorrow was not gone, for her dearest earthly tie had been broken, and it was fitting that she should feel her bereavement; but her sorrow was now enlightened by assured confidence in the Lord, and she could consequently quietly sit in the house while Martha, with her eager impatience, went forth to meet Him. No doubt they were very different characters, and would be, even to the end, very different vessels: this, however, would not wholly account for the contrast; rather it was that, inasmuch as Mary had sat at the feet of Jesus and heard His word while Martha was cumbered with much serving, Mary had learnt more than Martha of the heart of her Lord.

The grace of the Lord in dealing with Martha cannot well be passed over. Martha went and met Him, and apparently without a moment's pause, her heart blurted out its impatience, and its ill-concealed reproach in the words, "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." This was true, for death could not have taken place in the presence of the Lord; in Martha's lips, however, the truth was the expression of her complaint that the Lord had not been there before her brother died. Added to this, which plainly betrayed her state of soul, she ventured to say, in her ignorance of the true character of the Person of Him to whom she was speaking, and as if indicating the course which *she* thought He might now pursue, "But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee." She had, therefore, faith, faith at least, in the Lord as having power with God as a prophet, for example, like Elisha had; but it is evident that she had no conception, even though she had accepted Him as God's Christ, that she stood before the Son of God. How tenderly, notwithstanding, the Lord dealt with her weakness and defective faith! And how gently, stooping down to the state in which He found her, He led her on to the truth of what He was, that He in His own Person was both the resurrection and the life. "Thy brother," He said, "shall rise again." "Yes," said Martha, "I know that he shall rise again at the last day," for she believed, with every godly Jew, that "at the last day" there would be a resurrection of the just. Thereupon, using even the unbelief of His servant as the occasion, the Lord proclaimed to Martha, and to all His people through her, "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die." Blessed revelation of the coming removal of the judgment of death that lay upon His people, and of life in resurrection in Him who would bear the judgment, and as the risen One be the Life of all believers. One word more He uttered to Martha, "Believest

thou this?" "Yea, Lord," she replied, "I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, who should come into the world" — that is, the Messiah according to the teaching of Psalm 2.

Martha, having uttered her confession of faith, faith really, though falling so far short of the testimony she had just heard, went her way, as if feeling that she had not understood the Lord's words, and that Mary, her sister, might enter into their meaning, and "called Mary her sister secretly, saying, The Master is come, and calleth for thee." Mary is thus brought again before us; and it could scarcely be doubted, that even if Martha had not directly received the message, she had yet the Lord's mind in calling her sister. The state of Mary's soul is at once shown by her response to Martha's word: "As soon as she heard, she arose quickly, and came unto him." It was love that constrained her swift obedience. She sat quietly in the house, waiting until He should call, and then, when His call reached her, she made haste to respond to it. Waiting before the Lord is the sure means of qualification for obedience to His bidding. And what a relief to her burdened heart it must have been to come unto HIM! But before the character of the meeting is given, the Spirit of God pauses to note two particulars: First, that Jesus was not yet come into the town, but was in that place where Martha met Him; and, secondly, that the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, when they saw that Mary rose up hastily, and went out, followed her, saying, "She goeth unto the grave to weep there." Everything was divinely arranged, and the eye-witnesses of the power of Jesus were divinely provided, for God purposed to raise up a striking testimony to His beloved Son.

Now we may observe the character of Mary's approach to her Lord; and in what touchingly tender words it is narrated: "Then when Mary was come where Jesus was, and saw him, she fell down at his feet, saying unto him, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." Every word of this description is significant. When Martha went and met the Lord — at once she spoke; but two things are stated of Mary before she expressed the sorrow of her heart: when Mary had come into His presence, it was *when she saw Him*, and *had fallen at His feet*, that her lips uttered her pent-up feeling. Nay, it would seem that Mary fell at His feet in consequence of having gazed upon His face. She knew more of the Lord than her sister, and with her quick and responsive affection she would read in His countenance what Martha could not have perceived. And what did she behold there? The expression of a heart bowed down under the sorrow that lay upon her own spirit, the sorrow caused by the judgment of death which at that moment was lying upon all around, and also the expression of His intense sympathy with those whom He loved in this the hour of their grief. Was there more? We cannot tell, and yet surely as He was about to "manifest forth his glory" (John 2: 11), there were some indications of it to be gathered by one who had learnt so much of His mind. We know not; we may be confident, however, that *what* Mary saw in that face of tenderness, sorrow, and love, bowed her down at His feet. It is her attitude, as she poured forth the same words as Martha, which invests them with altogether a different meaning. In her case there might have been perplexity, but certainly there was neither complaint nor implied reproach: it was rather her heart's confession that *if* He had been in Bethany her brother would not have died — more than this she would not say, for great as her grief was, she could, and she did, trust in Him implicitly. Ah! it is blessed to be at the feet of Jesus in our sorrows, for there divine light shines upon them, and though we may suffer, and even be oppressed with our trials, we shall not, while there doubt His love.

Two things follow, two marvellous things, in connection with the Lord, which, if they are beyond our comprehension, may not be passed over; for they are called forth by Mary's tears, and the tears of the Jews who came with her. It says explicitly that "when Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, He groaned in the spirit, and was troubled." This was the first thing; and we may surely be allowed to ask, What was it that evoked this groan from the Lord's inmost soul and thus troubled Him? Without discussing the exact force of the word rendered "groaned," we may at least say that His being so "deeply moved," or "groaning," was caused by His having gone down in spirit under the heavy load of sorrow which lay upon the heart of Mary and upon the hearts of those around. Through His sympathy He entered into their grief, identified Himself with it, took it up upon His own shoulders, so to speak, and He felt the burden so heavily in His perfect knowledge of its cause, and in His estimate of its real character before God, that it extorted this groan. And remember that the essence of this burden was *death* - for death at that moment lay upon the mourners' hearts and upon the whole scene. But death is the judgment of God upon man; and consequently we may say that the Lord in this scene anticipated His death upon the cross; only here He took up and bore this judgment in His compassion and sympathy, whereas on the cross He bore it for the glory of God in making atonement for sin. How precious it makes the Lord to our own hearts when we see such a manifestation of His love and sympathy for His own in their griefs, and as we learn anew that in all their affliction He was afflicted.

His thoughts, when He groaned in the spirit and was troubled, were upon Lazarus in his grave, for He immediately said, "Where have ye laid him? They said unto him, Lord, come and see." Then we have the second thing which is to be reverently noted: JESUS WEPT. No words could enhance our wonder at this remarkable statement; it is one to be observed and meditated upon in the presence of God, as our hearts pour out their thanksgivings in that we are permitted to witness, as it were, this precious evidence of the ineffable sympathy of our blessed Lord. All know that the verses of our Bible are merely a human arrangement; and yet who can doubt that the Spirit of God controlled the one who made it in putting these two words into one verse! They indeed should stand alone, inasmuch as they afford such an inlet into the inmost recesses of the Lord's heart. They have been the comfort of mourners in all ages, and they will continue to minister consolation to His people until God Himself shall wipe away all tears from their eyes. His tears, it may be added, expressed His sympathy, but the sympathy itself flowed out of His heart of unfathomable and unquenchable love.

The remarkable thing is that Mary is no more seen in the narrative. After she had poured out the grief of her laden heart at the feet of Jesus, she disappears from view. But she was there, and she undoubtedly saw His tears;* and, moreover, when Jesus, "groaning in himself," went to the grave, Mary must have been in His company. A reflection or two may be permitted in this connection. From the fact of her not being afterwards mentioned in this chapter, it may be concluded that the result of her exercises had been reached when at the feet of Jesus. If so she would have received the consolation of His sympathy through His tears; and then, walking with Him to the grave, she would experience the support of His presence. All now — all in connection with Lazarus — was in His hands, and she could, we may assuredly say, rest in His love without a quiver or a pang. He, she now knew, would do the best possible thing, even if her faith had not, as we think it had, apprehended the coming deliverance. Already, therefore, the clouds which had gathered in her soul were scattered — as the mist before the rising sun — and

she would walk to the grave, in the company of her Lord, above and "beyond the power of death," and the calmest soul in that sorrowing company. Moreover, now from this point the object of the Spirit of God was not Martha nor Mary, but the glory of God, and the testimony to the glory of the Person of Jesus as the Son of God.

*It is not said that the groaning was audible; on the other hand, we read that He groaned in the spirit, and again that it was in Himself; and hence it was not necessarily heard. But His tears were not concealed. The groaning indeed was before God; His tears were the expression of His sympathy with His people.

Martha does once more appear on the scene. When Jesus had — again groaning in Himself — come to the grave ("It was a cave, and a stone lay upon it") He said, "Take ye away the stone." At once, instead of being awed and hushed into silence and expectancy, Martha broke in and said, "Lord, by this time he stinketh, for he hath been dead four days." Poor Martha! She ventured thus even to correct her Lord — judging as she did from the sight of her eyes. How calmly, and yet solemnly, does the Lord rebuke her folly, as He replied, "Said I not unto thee, that if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God." The stone was taken away, and all was now in readiness for the display of this effulgent glory. But first, ever glorifying the Father in all that He did, Jesus lifted up His eyes, and said, "Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that thou hast sent me." Giving glory to God, He yearned at the same time over the souls of those around, that they might receive Him as the sent One from the Father — the striking testimony to which they were about to behold. "And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with grave clothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him and let him go."

Thus was it demonstrated that Jesus, sent into this world from the Father, was the Son of God. Of Mary and Martha nothing more is said in this chapter; but, from what follows in the next, we may gather that the Lord's object in their trial was fully attained, that the two sisters had been divinely taught through what they had experienced and witnessed, that the Lord was more than ever, because she had embraced more fully the glories of His Person, the blessed portion of Mary's heart, and that, Martha's natural anxieties and care having been expelled by the new revelation made to her soul, she henceforward became a quiet and devoted servant.

MARY ANOINTING THE FEET OF JESUS.

(JOHN 12: 1-8.)

SOME little time had elapsed since the raising of Lazarus, and Jesus was found again at Bethany. The notable miracle which had been wrought, testified to by so many witnesses, even by some who still rejected Christ (ver. 46), produced such a commotion at Jerusalem that a special council was summoned by the Jewish authorities to consider what should be done. No attempt was made, remarkable to say, to deny that Lazarus had been raised from the dead; the fact was tacitly admitted, for they said, "What do we? for this man doeth many miracles. If we let

him thus alone, all men will believe on Him: and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation." God acted behind their deliberations, and took up Caiaphas, as in former days He had used Balaam, to prophesy that Jesus should die for that nation; and "from that day forth they took counsel together for to put him to death." Jesus retired with His disciples from before the hostility of the Jews., for His hour was not yet come, and waited in a city called Ephraim. But the time was drawing near when the true Passover Lamb was to be killed, although it is ever to be remembered that no man took His life from Him, but that He laid it down of Himself; and six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, "where Lazarus was which had been dead, whom he raised from the dead." There — in the house of Simon the leper, both Matthew and Mark say — "they made him a supper." John does not specify where the supper was made — and no doubt he is silent on this point purposely — as his object is rather to call attention to the fact that Martha and Mary and Lazarus were all present, and in the enjoyment of the fruit of their exercises and divine teaching in connection with the sickness, death and resurrection of Lazarus. How blessed for the soul when the object of God's dealing with it is reached and realised!

The first record of the Spirit of God is — "and Martha served." She had served before, but she had been "cumbered" with her service; she had rendered it in her own way, and had thus felt it to be a burden. Now her heart is at rest, and she enjoyed, in true liberty of soul, the happy privilege of waiting upon, of ministering to, her Lord. Quite a different vessel from Mary, she occupies a suitable place, the place for which she had been fitted, and she fills it too for the Lord's pleasure. "But Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him." He had passed through death, and had been raised, if still in his former condition, by Him who was, and is, the Resurrection and the Life, and thus he was seated with the Lord in the enjoyment of the feast. In like manner, quickened together with Christ, and raised up together, we are made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus; but Lazarus, as seen here, is rather a figure of those with whom the Lord, in a future day, will drink "new wine" in His Father's kingdom. It should be observed, before passing on, that the supper was made for Jesus, they delighted His heart, even as Levi, in another way, made Him a great feast in his own house, when he gathered a great company of publicans and sinners — those whom the Lord came to call to repentance.

All this is but introductory to our special subject — the anointing by Mary of the feet of the Lord. Its importance, and, it might be said, the value according to God's own estimate, is seen from the fact that it is recorded by Matthew and Mark, with characteristic differences of detail, as well as by John. If these three devoted souls, devoted to the Lord, and bound to Him with the imperishable ties of divine affection which He Himself had begotten in their hearts, in the time of His rejection, represent, as they indeed truly were, the remnant which God had prepared to receive His beloved Son (see John 1: 12, 13), Mary, with the faith that attached her to Christ Himself as her sole and absorbing object, going far beyond this position, becomes for all time a pattern for all Christians. Like the Magdalene in this respect, she was dead to the world, the world was dead to her, and Christ alone filled her heart. In her, "first love" finds its complete exemplification; and hence the unstinting and unqualified commendation she received from the lips of the Lord. There is, no preface to her action, but, immediately upon the record that "they made him a supper," the statement follows, "Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard," etc. The preface indeed, if such it may be called, is to be sought in the preceding chapters. Souls do not reach this spiritual elevation in a moment, nor did Mary, but her devotedness was the result of her sitting at the feet of Jesus, and hearing His word, and of her blessed experiences in

connection with the death of her brother. In her sorrow she had, after her deep exercises, realised the sympathy of her Lord, and thereupon His strong hand laid hold of her for support, and had moreover drawn her to His own side. She had thus reached Him (we speak of the true significance of her state) on the other side of death; she knew Him as the resurrection and the life, and in that sphere His glory, the glory of His Person as the Son of God, flooded her soul. In such wise Christ had become everything to her; and she was moreover a delight to the heart of Christ.

It is only in this way that we can appreciate the action which we are now to consider. One other thing may perhaps be first added. It was not only the act, but it was also the feeling which led to the act which contains such blessed instruction. As another has so aptly said, "It was the instinct of affection which felt that death was casting its shadow over Him who was the Life, as Jesus felt it also — the only case in which Jesus found sympathy on earth." Here then is the secret of the anointing — a heart so charged with love that it entered into and identified itself with the position, and even the feelings of Jesus, and then lavished its most precious possession upon its object. Surely it is only love that can understand love, and only love that can penetrate into the secrets of the heart of the One loved. Our attention is called to the fact that the ointment of spikenard was very costly, and assuredly to teach us that in the estimate of love nothing is too precious for the One who possessed Mary's heart. She also expressed, as it appears to us, two other things by the act: first, her sense of the worthiness of Christ; and, secondly, her adoration. These two things are combined in Revelation 5, and they are ever united in hearts that are in the enjoyment of the love of Christ. In the estimation of all such -

"No place too high for Him is found,

No place too high in heaven."

Mary was upon earth and Christ was about to be offered as the true Paschal Lamb, but in Mary's heart the sentiment was energetic, that no place in earth or heaven was too exalted for Him who sat at table with His own that evening in Bethany. Hence it was that Mary, to express this feeling, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair, and as she did so, her whole soul bowed before Him in gratitude and adoration. Whether the whole truth of His glorious Person had yet dawned upon her, we know not, but the "instinct of affection" through which she had been led into the apprehension of His coming death, would also be used to enlarge her conceptions of the One who sat at the table before her eyes. She was indeed a true worshipper, and her overflowing heart poured forth its tribute of homage in the manner suited to the moment, as led, we must believe, by the Spirit of God. Overwhelmed with the vision of His grace and beauty, her heart absorbed in devotion to Him, and in communion with His own mind as to His rejection and death, she found an outlet for the emotions which filled her heart in breaking her alabaster box of ointment of spikenard very precious (Mark 14), and in pouring it on His head, as Mark says, and on His feet, as recorded by John. By this act she proclaimed that Christ was everything to her, and that He was worthy of the most precious thing which a redeemed heart could bestow.

These considerations prepare us for the statement that the house was filled with the odour of the ointment. This was a matter of fact, but underlying the fact is the teaching that nothing is

so fragrant to the heart of God, or to the hearts of the saints, when in communion with Him, as an act of absorbing devotedness to Christ. Its odour steals abroad, like the dawning light of the morning, until it reaches all that are in the house, the habitation of God by the Spirit. Who, indeed, has not felt it in some feeble measure, when gathered with the saints around the Lord? Some note of praise has been struck by an adoring soul, which, like grateful incense ascending up to the Father, has filled, at the same time, every heart in the assembly with its blessed fragrance. For all time therefore it is true that, when a "Mary" anoints the feet of her Lord with her costly ointment, the house is filled with the odour of the ointment.

A little leaven leavens the whole lump. John tells us that Judas found fault with Mary's act. Mark says that there were "some," and Matthew that the Lord's "disciples" had indignation, saying, "To what purpose is this waste?" John discovers the root of the defection in the covetous heart of Judas; and it would seem that his affected piety and concern for the poor influenced all the disciples. What a contrast! The odour of Mary's ointment filled the house; the evil thought of Judas spread its malign influence over the hearts of all the disciples! We are thus on the one hand encouraged, and on the other, admonished. The wickedness, however, of Judas only brought out the expression of the Lord's appreciation of what Mary had done. To gain his own ends, or rather disappointed because he could not, he speciously assumed the mask of a philanthropist, and would have it believed that the benefit of the poor should occupy the first place in the hearts of the Lord's disciples. It was simple hypocrisy, as John tells us, "Not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein." What a solemn warning! An evil tendency nursed may so develop as to overmaster us entirely, and lead to the commission of the most appalling sins, as in the case of this man. Covetousness, the love of money which is the root of all evil, led Judas on from step to step, blinding his soul, until he consummated his frightful iniquity in betraying his Lord for thirty pieces of silver. By transgression he fell, that he might go to his own place.

In verse 6 we have the veil removed from the heart of Judas, that we might see the inner workings of his evil spirit; in the next verse the Lord answers the question of Judas as given in verse 5: "Let her alone: against the day of my burying hath she kept this. For the poor always ye have with you; but me ye have not always." The Lord thus tenderly shielded Mary from reproach, and proclaimed to all who had ears to hear, that she, however taunted, had divined the secret of His death, and that in communion with His own mind about it, she had identified herself with it. It was therefore a supreme moment to her, and she seized the opportunity, for it would never recur, to anoint that holy body for His burying. Whether she understood all this, we know not, but the Lord attributed this significance to her act; she would not have the Lord always, after this manner, and she thus eagerly poured out this tribute of her deep affection at His feet, while He sat at the table six days before the Passover. The Lord added another thing, as recorded by Matthew and Mark: "Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her." We learn from this how grateful to the heart of the Lord this act of Mary's had been, and what an unspeakable recompense He attached to it. As long as the gospels exist, Mary's act will be celebrated and also enshrined in the hearts of God's people; and in this sense also the house will be for ever filled with the odour of the ointment.

Together with this incident all mention of Mary ceases. But attention may be called to the fact, often noticed, that she does not, like Mary Magdalene and the other women, appear at the sepulchre. Nay, if the interpretation be correct, and we cannot doubt that it is, that she had been led in some sort into communion with His death, she would also be taught the uselessness of seeking the living One among the dead. Through His death a hope beyond death concerning her beloved Lord must have dawned upon her soul, detaching her from earth, and binding her heart to Him in that new scene and place on which He was about to enter. For remember, it had been her privilege to sit at His feet and hear His word, to receive His sympathy, support and succour in connection with Lazarus; she had seen the glory of God in His raising Lazarus, and she had seen Jesus glorified in it as the Son of God. It was scarcely possible therefore for her to think that He could be holden of death, or that God's holy One should see corruption; and she did not belie her faith by visiting His tomb. It is surely good to meditate upon this beautiful character — a character formed by divine teaching and power to refresh the heart of Christ in the scene of His rejection, and also to encourage us to tread in the same path of absorbing affection and entire devotedness. Taken all in all, there is not a more beautiful example of exalted spirituality in the whole Bible than that of Mary of Bethany, the sister of Martha and Lazarus.

MARY MAGDALENE.

IF the surmise be correct that Magdalene means simply that Mary came from the town of Magdala, she was a Galilean, and had been brought up by the shores of the lake of Galilee. The notices in Luke 23: 49, 55, certainly indicating Mary (see Luke 8: 2, 3), make it very clear that she came from Galilee, and consequently support the above conclusion. This being so, her identification with Mary of Bethany by many older writers is entirely without foundation, as we also believe is the attempt to connect her with the woman who was a "sinner," who washed the Lord's feet with tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head, and kissed His feet, and anointed them with the ointment, as recorded in Luke 7.* Nothing is more evident, if the narrative be carefully examined, than that the woman who was a sinner, Mary of Bethany, and Mary Magdalene, are three distinct persons, and that the anointing of our Lord in Luke 7 is to be distinguished from the anointing recorded by Matthew, Mark, and John. There are similarities, for indeed it could not be otherwise, but morally, and in their significance, they are completely different. If the records be read in their spirit rather than in their letter, it will at once be perceived that two very different states of soul and stages of spiritual experience are described and presented.

*This erroneous supposition is perpetuated even in the title of a hospital — Magdalene Hospital. A false etymology has done the same thing: *Maudlin* is a corruption of Magdalene. And not only is it bad etymology, but it embodies the unbelief of the world in the reality of penitence, for "maudlin" tears have come to mean the expression of weakness and sentimentality.

The first mention of Mary Magdalene is in Luke 8; and the passage must be given in its entirety to enable us to apprehend rightly its true import. "And it came to pass afterward, that He went through every city and village, preaching and showing, the glad tidings of the kingdom of God: and the twelve were with him, and certain women, which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary called Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils, and Joanna, the wife of

Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others, which ministered unto Him of their substance." (Luke 8: 1-3.) In this brief statement we find what is really the subject of the chapter, namely, the ministry of the word, the glad tidings of the kingdom of God, together with its effects in souls through divine power. Mary Magdalene is first mentioned after the twelve as an example. Her former state had been shocking in the extreme; she had been possessed of seven devils (demons), and was thus the subject of demoniacal control. In what way this had come about, or in what form this Satanic power had manifested itself is not recorded; but it can scarcely be conceived that Satan could assert his power so completely over a soul, except through abandonment to a guilty and sinful life; and the account of the demoniac in this same chapter shows the awful consequence of being characterised by Satan's full sway. The fact, however, is enough that seven demons had taken up their abode in the Magdalene's soul, and had made her the vessel of their wicked power. Men might have called her a dangerous lunatic, and shunned her accordingly; in any case she was repulsive, the sport of her own unrestrained passions, unutterably wretched and miserable.

But the eye of God, in pursuance of His eternal purposes of grace in Christ, rested upon that poor blighted and defiled soul; and in His own time she came across the path of the Lord Jesus; for she was one of the lost ones He had come to seek and to save. Where He found her is not revealed; but we do know that His blessed feet trod the shores of Galilee's lake, and Magdala was not so far distant from Capernaum, where the Lord sometimes made His home during His ministry. (See Mark 2: 1.) He did meet with this sorrowful outcast, and with His word of power He "cast out" from her the seven demons. He thus delivered her from the authority of darkness and translated her into the kingdom of God, which He had come to proclaim. Blessed change! She who had been the bond-slave of Satan, and made to do his bidding, however abhorrent and iniquitous, with her soul and body under his wicked control, was now brought into the blessed circle where grace was supreme, where God was exalted, and where she sat at the feet of the Lord Jesus clothed and in her right mind. It was indeed a passage out of darkness into light, out of bondage into liberty; and we may be sure that her heart made grateful melody to her Deliverer. Again we say, what a blessed change! Formerly, the seven demons held her in their grasp, but now the Lord Jesus possessed her heart, and, enshrining Himself there, drew her henceforward after Him in the path of devotedness and affection.

The first effect of the Lord's word then was deliverance; the next was attraction. We read that "the twelve were with Him" (Jesus), "*and* certain women, who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary called Magdalene," etc. Mary, therefore, was one of those who had the unspeakable privilege of being with the Lord in some of His evangelistic journeys. How came she thus to be in His company, and almost to anticipate the blessedness of those who, in the glory of the kingdom, will follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth? The simple answer to this question is that she was drawn, attracted by the grace of her Deliverer. It is a characteristic of this gospel that grace flowed out so mightily from our Lord and Saviour, that those who had become the subjects of it, in their needs and sorrows, were overmastered; and, detached from all that might have hindered them, were drawn, like Levi, to and after Him in the path of devoted discipleship. Henceforward they could not do without Him, for He had become the absorbing object of their hearts. It was so with Mary. Her one characteristic from the day of her deliverance was intense affection: she loved Him who had first loved her; and, as often remarked, nothing satisfies love but the company of its object. Thus it came to pass that Mary was found with Jesus,

with Him in the abounding joy of her salvation from the power of Satan, with Him in the sorrows of His pilgrim path, with Him in the day of His rejection, and with Him in adoration because her eyes had been opened to some extent to discern the glory of His Person. She had undoubtedly much yet to learn (as may be seen as we follow her history), but she was now in the company of God's beloved Son, the One in whom all God's thoughts and counsels were centred; she delighted in the One in whom God delighted; and the One, in whose company she was found, was the only channel through which any blessing could be received. There was then no place on earth equal to that which Mary, together with her companions, occupied when they were with Christ.

There is still another effect of the revelation of Christ to her heart through His word. After the specification of the names of Mary, Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, it says, "and many others, which ministered unto him of their substance." This last clause covers all the women, we apprehend, who are mentioned: if so, the Magdalene was one of those who were permitted to enjoy the favour of this blessed ministry. Two things follow from the fact thus stated. First, there was the recognition that she belonged wholly to the Lord; and, secondly, that whatever she possessed was at His disposal and for His service. These two things show how completely Mary had been redeemed from the hand of the enemy, and how entirely she owned the rights of her Redeemer. A beautiful illustration of the same thing is given in the case of Simon's wife's mother, who was taken with a great fever. In response to the earnest entreaty of those about her, the Lord "stood over her, and rebuked the fever; and it left her; and immediately she arose and ministered unto them." (Luke 4: 38, 39.) We may well inquire if *we* have followed these examples — that of Mary and that of Simon's mother-in-law. It should be the start of every converted soul, not the end reached after many years of indifference and sorrowful experiences, but *the start*. Our christian lives would be far happier if it were so, and our testimony to Christ would then shine out brightly upon the darkness around. If our consideration of the Magdalene's example should further this end, how blessed! But for it to be used in power, and to become operative in our hearts, we need to let the light shine in to expose all the hindrances; and then we should seek grace to judge them, that our souls set thereby in happy liberty might be free to be with the Lord in the intimacy of His affections, to follow Him wheresoever He may lead, and to minister unto Him as He may give the privilege and the opportunity.

MARY MAGDALENE AT THE CROSS AND AT THE BURIAL OF JESUS.

From the mention of Mary in Luke 8 until the crucifixion of our blessed Lord there is nothing further recorded. All the evangelists (although Luke does not give her name) mention that she was a witness of the Lord's death, or at least the accompaniments of His death; and wherever she is noticed in these last days in company with other women, she comes first, save in one instance. The exception is in John's gospel where the mother of Jesus is specified: "Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene." Here the chief object before the Lord's mind (and how beautiful it is to see it!) was His mother, as, now that He had finished the work which God had given Him to do, He was about to commit her to the care of the beloved disciple. In Matthew and Mark the Magdalene, seen in the company of others, stands first, teaching surely that the Lord had recognised the devotedness of her affection. Luke only says (and he twice speaks in this

manner); "the women that followed him from Galilee" (Luke 23: 49, 55); but as Matthew includes Mary among those "which followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering unto him" (Matt. 27: 55), we know that Mary was one of the number described by Luke. We have no account of the journeys when (as we have before remarked) Mary and the other Galilean women accompanied Jesus; but it is certain that they were with Him on His last visit to Jerusalem, when He was about to offer Himself, through the Eternal Spirit, without spot to God. What an immense favour accorded to these devoted souls — to hear His words, and to see His face during the last weeks of His life upon earth! But they were hidden until the end came, for the Spirit of God was not occupied with them and their privileges: all heaven, it might be truly said, had its attention then centred upon the Lamb that taketh away the sin of the world. When however the mighty work of atonement had been completed, the, Holy Spirit could notice, and cause to be recorded, the fidelity of the Magdalene and her companions.

Why then was Mary at the cross? It was because of her love to Him who had redeemed her from Satan's bondage. Jesus possessed her heart, and it was that which drew her to whatever place He went; and hence, as she had been, with Him, identified with Him, in life, she would also be identified with Him in His death. We have two glimpses of her at the cross, one before His death, and one afterwards. John alone records the former: he says, "Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene." (John 19: 25.) The beloved disciple also formed one of this company. At first, all the disciples, in the terror of the moment, when it was the hour of His enemies and of the powers of darkness, had forsaken their Master and fled. John had been recovered from his fear, and also Simon Peter in measure, for he "followed him afar off into the high priest's palace, and went in, and sat with the servants, to see the end." But alas! Peter went in trusting to his own strength, and, notwithstanding the warning he had received, fell into the awful sin of denying his Lord. Of the other disciples not a single word is said. How grateful then to the heart of the Lord it must have been to see this faithful four beside Him at His cross; He had felt it deeply, when in Gethsemane, that the chosen three could not watch with Him one hour; but now He was comforted in that there were four who were sustained to face the power of evil, which for the moment seemed to revel unchecked and triumphant; to overcome their own unutterable sorrows, as they were lost in the contemplation of His sufferings and grief, and to encounter all and every danger in their intense affection for Him who had become everything to their souls.

Mary Magdalene, however, is the subject of our meditations; and we thus pass by, on this occasion, the exquisite grace of the dying Saviour in commending Mary, His mother, to the care of the beloved disciple, and the less reluctantly in that it has been noticed in its place. Now it is with the Magdalene, out of whom Jesus had cast seven demons, that we are concerned. And what we desire to ascertain is the moral import of her taking up this position by the cross. It has already been said, and this will be understood by the youngest believer, that she was led there by her love to her Lord. It was consequently the expression of her entire devotedness. She might have indeed truly used the language of Ittai, "As the Lord liveth, and as my lord the king liveth, surely in what place my lord the king shall be, whether in death or life, even there also shall thy servant be." This was really the language of Mary's heart, as she watched by her Lord on the cross. If, however, we would seek the meaning in its application to ourselves, there is an additional thing. The death of Christ has two aspects. In His death He glorified God in all that He is, and this constituted the atonement, the righteous foundation on which He saves His redeemed.

That death may, on the other hand, be considered in its relation to us in this world. The apostle. Paul speaks of this when He says, "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptised into ['unto'] Jesus Christ were baptised into ['unto'] his death?" and he shows us that he had himself entered into the truth of this when he writes, — "I am crucified with Christ." In like manner Mary Magdalene (and those with her) had, in taking up her stand by the cross, identified herself with the death of Christ. She knew nothing of this, the full meaning of her act, and yet it was so; for she was dead to all the world, and the world was dead to her, while He who hung upon the cross before her eyes was all her life. It was really the Christian's normal state exemplified; and we may well challenge ourselves as to how far we answer to it.

Having pointed out the inner significance of the Magdalene's position, we will not attempt to fathom the contending emotions which filled her heart, and that of her companions. One thing was certain: to them, whatever the present darkness with which they were enshrouded, He was all they had believed Him to be. Not a single doubt as to Him disturbed their souls: rather He was, through His dying circumstances, dearer than ever to their hearts. We might almost venture to say that their dominant feeling, while standing there, was fellowship with His sufferings. It might have been perhaps His bodily sufferings which appealed to them then most powerfully; but we may be sure of this, that their absorbing affection for the Beloved Sufferer led them to sympathise, and to identify themselves, with all His state as far as they understood it. If Psalm 22 be read in this connection, we should be all the better able to comprehend what these devoted souls perceived as they reverently listened to the words which fell from those holy lips. The strong bulls of Bashan were there besetting Him round; they gaped upon Him with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion; and He? *He* was poured out like water, and all His bones were out of joint: His heart was like wax, it was melted in the midst of His bowels. His strength was dried up like a potsherd; and His tongue cleaved to His jaws; and then, turning to God, He said, THOU hast brought me into the dust of death. There was much more even than this, for the dogs were round about Him, and the assembly of the wicked enclosed Him: they pierced His hands and His feet — but we forbear. The reader can weigh the whole, and every sentence of the whole, in the psalm itself, and thereby he will be able to apprehend, in his measure, the character of the scene on Calvary, which was passing, at that moment, before the heart of the Magdalene. Blessed Sufferer! All the hopes of these four, and all our hopes, hang upon what Thou art and upon what Thou didst endure upon the cross. And we bless Thee, our God and Father, that we not only know it, but that Thou hast also placed our feet upon this Rock of Ages; and it is by Thy grace that we delight to own that we have no other foundation on which to rest before Thee but Christ and His finished work. For this we praise Thee now, and shall praise Thee throughout eternity. Amen.

The second glimpse of the Magdalene in connection with, but after the death of Christ, is found in the three first gospels. It is simply a general statement (we cite from Matthew) that "many women were there beholding afar off, which followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering unto him, among whom was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's children." (Matt. 27: 55, 56.) It is evident therefore that Mary had now retired from the place she occupied near the cross, and that she had joined the other women who had followed Jesus from Galilee. When the Lord committed His mother to the beloved disciple, he took her from that hour, we read, to his own home. If this signify immediately, it was probably the occasion of the break-up of that little devoted party (and it might have been at the

Lord's direction), and of the Magdalene's retirement with Mary, the wife of Cleophas, to the place where their companions from Galilee stood. This was afar off — at a distance, and yet so situated that they could behold what was passing. Luke says that "the women that followed him from Galilee, stood afar off, beholding these things." What the things were may be gleaned from a comparison of the gospels. There were the revilings of the passers-by, who wagged their heads, and said, "Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross;" there were the mockings of the chief priests, the scribes and the elders, who, unconsciously fulfilling scripture, even taunted Him with expressions from Psalm 22; the thieves who were crucified with Him joined in the general insults; the soldiers parted His garments, casting lots; there was the darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour; and there were above all the cries of the blessed Lord Himself, the first as He endured the forsaking of His God, and the second as He gave up the ghost. Then also the earth quaked and the rocks rent* — and these were the things, or some of these things, which the Magdalene and her companions saw, as they stood afar off — and saw, we may be sure, with weeping eyes and rent hearts.

*In Matthew this is given in connection with the saints who came out of their graves after the Lord's resurrection; but still he explicitly says that the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake.

And what must that blessed One, who was nailed to that cross, what must He have felt? The answer, as to His feelings in connection with His sufferings from man is found in these pleading words: "Draw nigh unto my soul, and redeem it: deliver me because of mine enemies. Thou hast known my reproach, and my shame, and my dishonour: mine adversaries are all before thee. Reproach hath broken my heart; and I am full of heaviness: and I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none." No! blessed Lord, Thine enemies had steeled their hearts against all pity, and there was not one, except the thief who hung by Thy side, who discerned at that moment who Thou wast, and Thy coming glory in the kingdom. No! not even the women, who followed thee from Galilee, not Mary Magdalene: they loved Thee much and devotedly, but as yet they had no light upon Thy resurrection. Then the greatest sorrow of all to His faithful followers must have been caused by the cry (those that stood by the cross must have heard it): "My God, my God, why hast thou FORSAKEN ME?" It was the expression of His immeasurable agony as He drank the bitter cup of the judgment of God; but thereby He glorified God fully and completely, and became the propitiation for the sins of His people, and for the whole world.

Death having been accomplished, there remained but one thing, and that was His burial. The prophet had said that His grave was to be appointed with the wicked (and so it would have been had it been left with his enemies to order it), but that He was found with the rich in His death — for so God had determined. Joseph of Arimathea, a secret disciple, was the chosen vessel for the accomplishment, in this respect, of the will of God. Obtaining the grant of his Lord's body from Pilate, he piously and reverently "laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock: and he rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre, and departed. And there was Mary Magdalene, and that other Mary, sitting over against the sepulchre:" as Mark says, they "beheld where He was laid." Mary was thus faithful in her devotedness to Christ; during His life, during His sorrows at the end, and after His death. He was really her *life*, and

when that great stone was rolled to the door of the sepulchre the Sun of her soul had set. He was the one and the sole treasure of her heart, and even if she had never seen Him again, the world would have become to her a barren wilderness under the judgment of God. For He was, in very deed, everything to her soul, and thus when the tomb received His body, she had, as far as the world was concerned, lost everything. Darkness may have lain upon her spirit, but, while her hopes were quenched, her heart's affections for the buried One, divinely begotten as they had been, were inextinguishable; and these would alleviate her grief, and be the source in God's hand, of light and hope still. How deliverance might come she knew not, and may-be did not expect it; but she loved Him who was still her Lord, and that was everything for God, and also for the Magdalene. It is not light that nourishes the soul, but love, and Mary loved much because she had been forgiven much. So always, the deeper the sense of the state from which we have been delivered, the more absorbingly intense our affection for the Deliverer.

MARY AND HER RISEN LORD.

After the reverent interment of the body of the Lord, Mary Magdalene with her companions who had come with Him from Galilee, who had seen how His body was laid (compare Luke 23: 55, 56, with Mark 15: 47, 16: 1), "returned, and prepared spices and ointments; and rested the sabbath day according to the commandment." Three things are thereby most clearly indicated: first, their affection for Christ; secondly, that they entertained no expectation of the resurrection; and, finally, their devout piety, as seen in their subjection to the word of God. They longed to lavish the tokens of their ardent love upon the dead body of their Lord; but as the sabbath followed immediately,* these holy women, among whom the Magdalene was the most prominent, quietly waited and rested in obedience to the commandment before carrying out their intention of anointing the sacred body of our blessed Lord. But "when the sabbath was passed, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint him. And very early in the, morning, the first day of the week, they came into the sepulchre at the rising of the sun," or, as Matthew says, "in the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week;" or, as John records, "when it was yet dark."

*It must be remembered that our blessed Lord was crucified on the Friday, and that the sabbath commenced at sunset the same evening. If then the ninth hour were three o'clock in the afternoon, Joseph must have acted with great promptitude in obtaining Pilate's permission to take down the body of Jesus from the cross, and in preparing it for burial so as to accomplish the entombment before the sabbath began. Luke indeed marks this by the statement, "and the sabbath drew on."

All these accounts show alike the engrossing affection of these women's hearts for the One whom they had known and followed, bound as they had been to Him by indestructible ties through the grace they had received at His hands. Nothing, therefore, was too precious in their estimation to lavish upon His body, and thus it was that with eager feet they sped their way in the early morning of this first day of the week — with not a thought of the surprise that awaited them. Their first perplexity was thus expressed, Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre? And when they looked they saw that the stone was rolled away: for it was very

great. Before following the narrative in John, one thing not mentioned there may be considered. Mark tells us explicitly that, on discovering that the stone was rolled away, the Magdalene, with Mary and Salome, entered into the sepulchre, and that "they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment; and they were affrighted." Immediately the "young man," discerning their fear, said, "Be not affrighted," and, announcing to them the fact of the resurrection, commissioned them to go to His disciples and Peter with the blessed tidings, and to tell them that the Lord would go before them into Galilee, adding, "There shall ye see him *as he said unto you.*" How far they discharged their mission we are not told: the only thing we learn* is that, overcome with fear, they fled from the sepulchre, and that they said nothing to any man for they were afraid.

*But see verses 9, 10, though this must refer to a later hour in the day.

As the Magdalene herself is our special subject, we propose now to consider the events described in John's beautiful narrative; for Mary is there the object before the mind of the Spirit, together with the teaching which flows from her experiences on this eventful day. The first thing to which our attention is called is, that when Mary saw that the stone was taken away from the sepulchre, she ran, and came to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and said unto them, "They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid Him." She was still without light, but her heart had only one object, and having for the moment lost that, she was filled with inexpressible grief; or rather, she poured out her grief in the touching accents which revealed her perfect desolation — they had taken away the Lord, and we "know not where they have laid Him." Peter and that other disciple ran with all haste to the sepulchre to verify for themselves the intelligence they had received. The former, with his characteristic eager spirit, the last to reach the place, for the other disciple outran Peter, went at once into the sepulchre, and saw "the linen clothes lie, and the napkin, that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself." All was in order and peaceful; but what Peter's thoughts were is not revealed, though, from the contrast which is marked with his companion, it is evident that he was still in unbelief. But that other disciple, who had come first to the sepulchre, then went in, "and he saw and believed. For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead." That is, "that, other disciple" believed from what he saw, from the testimony to his eyesight, that the sepulchre was empty. This faith was entirely inoperative, for having learned that the tomb was empty, and one of the two accepting the evidence thus afforded, they yet went away again unto their own home. These also loved the Lord, but their home attracted them, or was their refuge, in, this supreme moment in the history of redemption. Sight, speaking now of "that other, disciple," or intellectual conviction, is always powerless; it occupies itself with truth, and never leads to Christ Himself.

The experience of these two disciples is introduced here in order to bring out into fuller relief the greater devotedness of the Magdalene. The contrast is designed, as is clear from the words, "But Mary stood without at the sepulchre weeping." She could not go away to her own home, like the two disciples; her heart, desolate though it were, constrained her to remain at the spot where she had last seen the precious body of her Lord. "For her," as another has written, "without Jesus, the whole world was nothing but an empty sepulchre; her heart was more empty still. She stays there at the sepulchre, where the Lord whom she loved had been . . . she could not be comforted, because He was no more." It was indeed a dark moment in the history of her

soul: she was learning what it was to be morally dead with Christ. But He, risen from the dead as He was, had His eye upon her, and was only waiting for the proper moment to wipe away her tears by the revelation of Himself. One other stop preceded her blessing: "As she wept, she stooped down, and looked into the sepulchre, and seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. And they say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? She saith unto them, Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him." Observe how her heart is absorbed with her Lord. One thought, and one thought alone, engrossed her soul, and that was that she had lost her Lord. She was blind and deaf to everything else, for without Him she possessed absolutely nothing. So intense, moreover, was her attachment to Christ, that, as if there were no other on the face of the earth who loved Him, she appropriated Him entirely to herself. To the disciples she said, "*the* Lord," to the angels she said, "*my* Lord." It is the way of love; for while strong as death, its jealousy is as cruel as the grave which, closing in upon and possessing its object, excludes every other; and such love can never be quenched by the many waters nor drowned by the floods.

How grateful to the heart of the Lord must have been these signs of Mary's deathless affection; and it might be surely said, that they constituted an irresistible appeal to His own heart. Yea, He felt for her and sympathised with her in the desolation of her grief; and He was already on His way to give her the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. Thus, when she had answered the question of the angels, "she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus." All her desire was before her eyes and yet she was so pre-occupied with her own sorrow and with her own thoughts, that she did not recognise her Lord. It was not, say as with the two disciples on the way to Emmaus, that her eyes were holden; but, as she had no thought at that moment of Jesus except as having been buried and rapt away from the tomb, she was too absorbed with her own feelings to think of anything else. There was Jesus standing before her eyes, and she knew not that it was Jesus. Ah! beloved reader, how often have we been in similar circumstances. In the midst of great disappointments or griefs, the Lord has drawn near to our souls, and we did not recognise Him. Instead of welcoming Him, we were rather like the disciples who, when they saw Jesus walking upon the sea, thought that they had seen a spirit, and cried out for fear. We can therefore understand how it was that Mary did not recognise her Lord. Indeed, it was of Himself that she did not, for He was seeking His sheep, and about to call her by name; and through grace she was ready to hear and to respond to that well-known voice.

Jesus then interposed, and He said to her, "Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou?" The angels had only said, "Why weepest thou?" The Lord added to the question, "Whom seekest thou?" for He could answer in this respect the absorbing desire of Mary's heart. The angels could not reveal the object of her quest; but there was the Lord Himself standing before Mary, and yet she knew Him not! Pre-occupation with our own thoughts always blinds and retains us in unbelief; and so it was with the Magdalene. She *supposing* Him to be the gardener, said unto Him, "Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid Him, and I will take Him away." It has often been remarked that Mary was so engrossed with her object that she did not think of the possibility of any one not knowing whom she sought. Blessed absorption! There was no one else in all the world for her heart, and there was consequently no need to say who *He* was. Observe, moreover, that there are no impossibilities to love. She was a weak woman, and yet she says, "and I will take him away"! Would that we all knew more of this

invincible affection which binds the soul to Jesus with adamantine ties, and makes it willing, yea, fills it with delight, to bear any burden which He may appoint.

What greater proof could the Lord have had of His servant's devotedness? He knew her heart, but He delights in the expression of what had been begotten there through His love. He had waited therefore for Mary to tell out the uttermost of *her* love before He should reveal Himself and turn her sorrow into joy. That moment had now arrived, and with one word, the utterance of her name, He caused the light, the light of His own presence, to shine out of darkness in her sorrowing soul. He was the good Shepherd, and as the good Shepherd He had given His life for the sheep; and moreover, as the good Shepherd, He calleth His sheep by name and leadeth them out. It was thus that He called Mary by name: "Jesus saith unto her, Mary." That one word, spoken as He only could have spoken it, went right home to her heart of hearts, scattered all the mists of unbelief which had gathered there, delivered her from all her own thoughts, and revealed Christ to her as risen from the dead. What a mighty change was thus wrought in her soul! The moment before she was filled with inconsolable grief, with a grief which could only be measured by the intensity of her love, and now instantaneously her tears are wiped away by the revelation of her Lord. That call which He had addressed to her produced an immediate response, for "she turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni (which is to say, Master)." It is ever thus when the divine call is recognised, because it carries with it the revelation of the Person who gives it, and its own divine authority. So when Jesus saw Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea, and called them, they straightway left their nets and followed Him. For He who called, as with the Magdalene, threw the constraint of His love around them, and they could not but follow. Blessed moment when the call of Jesus reaches the heart!

MARY AS THE LORD'S MESSENGER.

Before entering upon this, it is necessary to define in a few words the position of Mary. For this we will borrow the striking and beautiful language of another: "She represents, I doubt not," (that is before her risen Lord had made Himself known to her), "the Jewish remnant of that day, personally attached to the Lord, but not knowing the power of His resurrection. She is alone in her love: the very strength of her affection isolates her. She was not the only one saved, but she comes alone to seek — wrongly to seek, if you will, but to seek — Jesus, before the testimony of His glory shines forth in a world of darkness, because she loved Himself It is a loving heart . . . occupied with Jesus, when the public testimony of man is still entirely wanting. And it is to this that Jesus first manifests Himself when He had risen." This entirely explains the words of Jesus to her, "Touch me not." There must have been some gesture on the part of Mary, some outstretching of her hand to express the ardency of her love, as if Jesus risen would now be the Messiah on earth.*

*This will entirely remove the apparent contradiction between this and the account in Matthew, according to which the woman held Jesus by the feet and worshipped Him, because in that gospel He is presented as the Messiah.

But He had not come back now to establish His kingdom on earth, for, as He says to Mary, He had not yet ascended to His Father. Before the manifestation of His glory in this world, He was about to associate His redeemed with Himself in His own heavenly relationship. He had said before this, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. He had died, and the fruit had been produced, and He now places His own, on the ground of redemption, in His own heavenly relationship; so that we obtain a glimpse here of the end of God's counsels in conforming His own to the image of His own Son, who having glorified God on the earth, and finished the work which had been given Him to do, was about to be glorified as Man — as the Man of God's counsels — at God's right hand.

It was of these glorious truths that Mary was the commissioned messenger. "Go to my brethren," the Lord said to her, "and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God." Before Mary could carry such a message (for she must in her measure be in the truth of it) she had to learn that henceforward she could never again know Christ after the flesh, that, though she had thus known Him, she was henceforward to know Him so no more, for the old things had passed away and new things had come. Never more would she follow her Lord on earth, but she could, and it would be her blessed privilege to follow Him to the place where He was about to dwell. In one word, she was nevermore to know Him in His condition of flesh and blood, but as the heavenly Man, glorified at God's right hand. Not that she had yet entered into all this, for the Holy Spirit had not yet come, still we may be assured that her heart had been opened to receive much in such an interview. Whether she apprehended much or little, having received her commission she hastened to execute it. "Go to my brethren," the Lord said: "Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that he had spoken these things unto her." It was a privilege indeed to be the bearer of such tidings, and she showed her appreciation of it by her exact and speedy obedience to the command she had received. Her qualification for this service was, first of all, her affection for Christ; she loved Him supremely, and her love, constraining her, sped her upon her errand. Then also, she possessed the needful qualifications of a true witness, she had *seen* and *heard*. (Compare John 3: 11; 1 John 1: 3), and she could thus testify to the disciples.

A few words may perhaps be bestowed again upon the import of the message. Never until this moment had the Lord termed the disciples His brethren. Servants and friends He had called them; but now in virtue of His death and resurrection He could put them upon the same platform — that of resurrection — as that on which He stood. The following words explain His meaning, "I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God." "I ascend unto my Father" — this was intended to teach that the scene of the new relationship into which He was putting them was heaven. They had known, loved and followed Him on earth; but all this time they were in the condition (whatever the counsels of God about them) of the earthly people; but now they were to pass over into the place and relationship of heavenly saints through association with the Risen One. And it should be most carefully marked, as explaining the meaning of the message, that the place and relationship upon which Christ Himself entered as risen out of death, and ascended into heaven, determine that of His people. In other words, it is only in Christ risen and glorified that we can read what are the counsels of God concerning His redeemed: "As is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly." (1 Cor. 15: 47-49.) It is in accordance with these blessed truths that the apostle Paul says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus

Christ, who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ;" and he proceeds to unfold that all the blessings into which we have been introduced flow to us from those two titles — the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ — and that, as the effect of those counsels, we are brought to stand in the same place and relationship as Christ Himself. What unutterable grace! And how closely it links us both with the heart of God, and with the heart of our blessed Lord.

Nothing further is said of the Magdalene; but two things remain to be noticed. The first is, the effect of her message; and the second is as to what became of Mary. The effect of the message was that the disciples were gathered together. It was truly in weakness and in fear of the Jews; but still they were gathered, and the doors were shut, shut upon the enmity of man, and excluding the world. It was to be a new and heavenly circle — the assembly — and as it was so constituted that night, on the evening of that day of days, the new first day of the week, Jesus came, and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you; and when He had so said, He showed unto them His hands and His side. Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord. That circle was thus filled with peace — the peace which Christ had brought up out of death for them, having glorified God — and with His own blessed presence. They had often enjoyed His company before, but now they knew Him, however feeble their apprehensions, in a new way, as the Risen One — His actual resurrection being confirmed to them, in their weakness, by being shown in His condescending grace, His hands and His side. His love they had known in measure before; now they knew it as the love which was stronger than death, and which bound them to His heart for ever. Thus it was that they were glad when they saw the Lord.

The second point is as to what became of Mary. The answer is that she disappeared; she was lost in the assembly. She was one of that blessed company in the midst of which the Lord stood, where all that is of man disappears, where every one loses his individuality, merged as he is into the sanctified company, among whom there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but CHRIST IS ALL (everything) and *in* ALL. Happy is it for every believer when he is lost in like manner in the place where Christ, and Christ alone, is supreme, and where His glory floods the soul!