

# HARRIET STOWE

RELIGIOUS STUDIES,  
SKETCHES AND POEMS

Гарриет Бичер-Стоу

**Religious Studies, Sketches and Poems**

«Public Domain»

**Бичер-Стоу Г.**

Religious Studies, Sketches and Poems / Г. Бичер-Стоу — «Public Domain»,

© Бичер-Стоу Г.  
© Public Domain

# Содержание

INTRODUCTORY NOTE	5
RELIGIOUS STUDIES	8
I	8
II	13
III	20
IV	24
V	29
VI	31
VII	36
VIII	39
IX	41
X	43
XI	46
XII	48
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	49

# Harriet Beecher Stowe

## Religious Studies Sketches and Poems

### INTRODUCTORY NOTE

No one can read Mrs. Stowe's writings as a whole without perceiving how constant is the appeal to the religious sensibilities. Her greatest book, which took captive the humblest reader and such a genius in literature as George Sand, was in a marked degree a religious book; and again and again, even in playful scenes, there is a quick passage to the religious nature. The explanation is in the simple fact that Mrs. Stowe herself from early girlhood to her latest years was governed by religion, and it is not surprising, therefore, that an entire volume should be gathered from her writings exclusively given over to direct expression of religious feeling and thought.

She would gladly, especially in her later life, have confined herself to writing of this sort, for the realities of faith, especially the presence of the Divine Master, came to have a commanding power over her mind and heart, and to make her almost impatient of much concern about adventures of the ordinary sort. Even the reminiscence of the racy life of the New England of her childhood could not absorb her. "I would much rather," she writes in 1876 to her son Charles, "have written another such a book as *Footsteps of the Master*, but all, even the religious papers, are gone mad on serials." The book which she was then writing was *Pogonuc People*, and the reader knows what a thread of religious experience runs through that lively narrative.

*Footsteps of the Master* was published in 1877. In its original form, each section contained interludes of verse, sometimes her own, more frequently hymns and poems from well-known sources. There were also scriptural passages illustrative of the great divisions, and the book was set forth thus as a devotional companion. In reissuing it in this volume, the poems by the author have been preserved in the section given to her Religious Poems; the others and the illustrative scriptural passages have been omitted and Mrs. Stowe's Meditations preserved in their continuous form. The word "To the Reader," prefixed to the volume, is as follows: —

When a city is closely besieged and many of its outworks destroyed, the defenders retreat to the citadel. In our day there is warm fighting about the outworks of Christianity. Many things are battered down that used to be thought indispensable to its defense. It is time to retreat to the citadel; and that citadel is Christ.

The old mediæval symbol shown above<sup>1</sup> is still more than ever good for our day. Jesus Christ of Nazareth is still our King, our Light, our Law, our Leader. These names comprise all that a human being needs in this transitory, perplexing and dangerous pilgrimage of life.

We are born to suffer. The very conditions of our mortal existence here imply suffering of the most terrible kind as a possibility, a probability, or a certainty. We have affections absorbing our whole being which are hourly menaced by danger and by death — at any moment our sweetest joys may become sources only of bitterest remembrance.

We are born to perplexity. We stand amid the jar and conflict of a thousand natural laws, to us inexplicable, and which every hour threaten us in ourselves or those dearer than ourselves. We stand often in no less perplexity of moral law in ways where the path of duty and right is darkened and beset.

---

<sup>1</sup> The familiar combination of Rex, Lux, Lex, Dux.

We are born to die. At the end of every possible road of life lies the dark River – the unknown future. If we cling to life, it is only to see it wither gradually in our hands, to see friends dropping from our side, places vacant at our fireside, infirmities and pains gathering about us, and a new generation with their impetuous energies rising around us to say, Why do you wait here? Why are you not gone?

And the Hereafter? What is it? Who will go with us into that future where no friend, however dear, can accompany the soul? What hand of power and love will take ours in the last darkness, when we have let go all others?

The dear old book which we call the Bible gives our answer to all this. It tells us of a Being so one with the great Author of nature and Source of all power that whoso hath seen him hath seen the Creator. It tells us that all things that we behold in our material world were made by him and for him: that it pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell, and that to him all things in heaven and on earth are made subject. It shows him to us from the beginning of time as constantly absorbed in the care and education of this world of ours. He has been the Desire of all nations – predicted, waited for, come at last!

And when he came and lived a mortal life what did he show the divine nature to be? It may all be told in one word: – LOVE. Love, unconquered, unconquerable by human sin and waywardness. Love, sympathetic with the inevitable sorrows of human existence. Love, expressed in every form by which a God could express love. His touch was healing; the very hem of his garment had restoring virtue. He lived and loved as we live and love, only on a higher ideal, – he gave to every human affection a more complete interpretation, a more perfect fullness. And finally, as the highest revelation of Love, he died for us, and in anguish and blood and dying pains still loved, still prayed for us, the ungrateful race of man. He passed through the night of death that he might learn not to fear it, and came forth radiant and immortal to tell us that we shall never die.

By a refinement of infinite mercy, the law of our lives is written not in hard statutes but in the life of this tender and sympathetic friend. Christ is our law. We learn courage, patience, fortitude, forgiving love from him. The lesson impossible in statute is made easy by sympathy. But lest the very brightness of the ideal fill us with despair we have his promise, "Lo, I am with you alway to the end of the world! I will not leave you comfortless. I will come to you." Jesus, as an inseparable soul-friend – a consoler, a teacher, an enlightener – dwells on earth now in a higher sense than when he walked the hills of Palestine.

"Forever more beside us on our way,  
The unseen Christ doth move,  
That we may lean upon his arm and say,  
'Dost thou, dear Lord, approve?'"

To that great multitude whom no man can number, who are living the hidden life of faith, these studies into the life of our Master are dedicated. They have been arranged in the order of the seasons of the Christian year, with the hope of aiding the efforts of those who wish at these sacred seasons to bring our Lord more clearly to mind.

We hear much of modern skepticism. There is, perhaps, no more in the world now than there has always been, only its forms are changed. Its answer lies not in argument, but in the lives of Christ's followers. It was Christians who lived like

Christ that won the first battle for Christianity, and it must be Christians who live like Christ that shall win the last. The life of faith in the Son of God, when fully lived out, always has been and always will be a victorious argument.

But to live this our faith must be firm. We cannot meet a skeptical world with weak faith. If we would draw our friend out of a swift-rushing current, our own feet must not stand on slippery places. We must seek faith in looking to Him who has the giving of it. We must keep Him before our minds, and come so near Him in daily prayer that we can say: "That which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and our hands have handled, of the Word of Life, declare we unto you."

And even to those who have no conscious belief in Christ, his name can never be a matter of indifference. Whether they believe it or not, Christ stands to them in a peculiar relation that no other being holds. He is their best Friend, the Shepherd that is seeking them, the generous Saviour and Giver that is longing to save them from all that they fear and to give exceeding abundantly beyond all they can ask or think.

The other *Studies* and the *Religious Sketches* which follow are drawn from the early *Mayflower* and intimate how instinctively in the beginning of her career as a writer Mrs. Stowe turned her mind in this direction. Her poems appeared at irregular intervals and were gathered into a volume by themselves in 1867. The collection then issued is here slightly enlarged by the inclusion of one or two estrays.

## RELIGIOUS STUDIES FOOTSTEPS OF THE MASTER

### I CHRIST IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

#### **"The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."**

Our Lord asserts nothing more frequently than that he came to this world, not as other men come, but as a voluntary exile from a higher and purer life. He said in public, speaking to the Jews, "I came down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him that sent me." When the Jews tauntingly said to him, "Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham?" he answered, "Before Abraham was, I AM." In fact, while he walked as a brother among men, there were constant and mysterious flashes from the life of a higher sphere. Jesus moved about in our life as a sympathetic foreigner who ever and anon in moments of high excitement breaks out into his native language. So Christ at times rose into the language of heaven, and spoke for a moment, unconsciously as it were, in the style of a higher world.

He did not say, "Before Abraham was, I *was*," but "I AM," using the same form which in the Old Testament is used by Jehovah when he declares his name to Moses, "I AM that I am." So, too, when conversing with Nicodemus, our Lord asserts that he is the only person competent to bear testimony to heavenly things, because he came from heaven.

He says, "No man hath ascended into heaven but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven." This last is one of those changes into the language of a higher world which so often awed and perplexed those who talked with Jesus. It would seem that he had the power by moments to breathe aside the veil which separates from the higher state, and to be in heaven. Such a moment was this, when he was declaring to an honest-minded, thoughtful inquirer the higher truths of the spiritual life, and asserting his right to know about heavenly things, because he came down from heaven – yea, because for the moment he was in heaven.

But in the last hours of his life, when he felt the scenes of his humiliations and sufferings approaching, he declared this truth, so often shadowed and intimated, with explicit plainness. He said, "I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world. Again, I leave the world, and go to the Father." This was stating the truth as plainly as human words can do it, and the disciples at last understood him fully. "Lo! now speakest thou plainly, and speakest no proverb." And in that affecting prayer that followed our Lord breathes the language of an exile longing to return to the home of his love: "And now, O Father! glorify me with thine own self – with the glory that I had with thee before the world was."

It is then most plain on the face of the New Testament that our Lord had a history before he came to this world. He was a living power. He was, as he says, in glory with the Father before the world was. Are there any traces of this mysterious Word, this divine Son, this Revealer of God in the Old Testament? It has been the approved sentiment of sound theologians that in the Old Testament every visible appearance of an Angel or divine Man to whom the name of Jehovah is given is a pre-appearance of the Redeemer, Jesus. It is a most interesting study to pursue this idea through the Old Testament history, as is fully done by President Edwards in his "History of Redemption" and by Dr. Watts in his "True Glory of Christ." In Milton's "Paradise Lost" he represents the Son of God as

being "the Lord God who walked in the Garden of Eden" after the trespass of our first parents, and dwells on the tenderness of the idea that it was in the cool of the day, —

"when from wrath more cool  
Came the mild Judge and Intercessor both."

This sentiment of the church has arisen from the plain declaration in the first chapter of John, where it is plainly asserted that "no man hath seen God at any time, but the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." The Old Testament records to which our Lord constantly appealed were full of instances in which a being called Jehovah, and spoken of as God, — the Almighty God, — had appeared to men, and the inference is plain that all these were pre-appearances of Christ.

It is an interesting study for the sacred season of Advent to trace those pre-appearances of our Lord and Saviour in the advancing history of our race. A series of readings of this sort would be a fit preparation for the triumphs of Christmas, when he, the long-desired, was at last given visible to man.

We shall follow a few of these early appearances of the Saviour, in the hope that some pious hearts may be led to see those traces of his sacred footsteps, which brighten the rugged ways of the Old Testament history.

In the eighteenth chapter of Genesis we have an account of a long interview of Abraham with a being in human form, whom he addresses as Jehovah, the Judge of all the earth. We hear him plead with him in words like these; —

"Behold now, I have taken on me to speak unto Jehovah, which am but dust and ashes . . . that be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked. Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

What a divine reticence and composure it was, on the part of our Lord, when afterwards he came to earth and the scoffing Jews said to him, "Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham?" He did not tell them how their father Abraham had been a suppliant at his feet ages ago, yet he must have thought of it as they thus taunted him.

Again we read in Genesis xxviii., when Jacob left his father's house and lay down, a lonely traveler, in the fields with a stone for his pillow, the pitying Jesus appeared to him: —

"He dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached unto heaven; and behold the angels of God ascending and descending upon it. And behold, Jehovah stood above it, and said, I am Jehovah, God of Abraham, thy father."

As afterwards Jesus, at the well of Samaria, chose to disclose his Messiahship to the vain, light-minded, guilty Samaritan woman, and call her to be a messenger of his good to her townsmen, so now he chose Jacob — of whom the worst we know is that he had yielded to an unworthy plot for deceiving his father — he chose him to be the father of a powerful nation. Afterward our Lord alludes to this vision in one of his first conversations with Nathaniel, as given by St. John: —

"Jesus said unto him, Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig-tree, believest thou? thou shalt see greater things than these, Verily I say unto you, hereafter ye shall see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man."

This same divine Patron and Presence watches over the friendless Jacob until he becomes rich and powerful, the father of a numerous tribe. He is returning with his whole caravan to his native land. But the consequence of his former sin meets him on the way. Esau, the brother whom he deceived and overreached, is a powerful prince, and comes to meet him with a band of men.

Then Jacob was afraid and distressed, and applies at once to his heavenly Helper. "I am not worthy," he says, "of all the mercy and all the truth which thou hast shown to thy servant, for with my staff I passed over this Jordan and now I am become two bands. Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother Esau, for I fear him, lest he come and smite me and the mother with the children." Such things were common in those days – they were possible and too probable – and what father would not pray as Jacob prayed?

Then follows a passage of singular and thrilling character. A mysterious stranger comes to him, dimly seen in the shadows of the coming dawn. Is it that human Friend – that divine Jehovah? Trembling and hoping he strives to detain him, but the stranger seeks to flee from him. Made desperate by the agony of fear and entreaty, he throws his arms around him and seeks to hold him. The story is told briefly thus: —

"And Jacob was left alone. And there wrestled A MAN with him until the breaking of day. And when he saw that he prevailed not he touched the hollow of his thigh, and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint as he wrestled with him. And the man said, Let me go, for the day breaketh; and he said, I will not let thee go except thou bless me. And he said, What is thy name? and he said, Jacob. And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince thou hast power with God and with men, and hast prevailed. And Jacob said, I beseech thee tell me thy name. And he said, Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name? And he blessed him there."

How like is this mysterious stranger to the One in the New Testament history who after the resurrection joined the two sorrowful disciples on the way to Emmaus. There is the same mystery, the same reserve in giving himself fully to the trembling human beings who clung to him. So when the disciples came to their abode "he made as though he would go farther," and they constrained him and he went in. As he breaks the bread they know him, and immediately he vanishes out of their sight.

In his dying hour (Gen. xlviii.) the patriarch Jacob, after an earthly pilgrimage of a hundred and forty-seven years, recalls these blessed visions of his God: —

"And Jacob said to Joseph, God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me."

And again, blessing the children of Joseph, he says: —

"God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God which fed me all my life long unto this day, the Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads."

But it was not merely to the chosen father of the chosen nation that this pitying Friend and Saviour appeared. When the poor, passionate, desperate slave-girl Hagar was wandering in the wilderness, struggling with the pride and passion of her unsubdued nature, he who follows the one wandering sheep appeared and spoke to her (Gen. xvi.). He reproved her passionate impatience; he counseled submission; he promised his protection and care to the son that should be born of her and the race that should spring from her. Wild and turbulent that race of men should be; and yet there was to be a Saviour, a Care-taker, a Shepherd for them. "And she called the name of the Lord that spake unto her, Thou God seest me; for she said, Have I also here looked after him that seeth me?"

Afterwards, when the fiery, indomitable passions of the slave-woman again break forth and threaten the peace of the home, and she is sent forth into the wilderness, the Good Shepherd again appears to her. Thus is the story told (Gen. xxi.): —

"And the water was spent in the bottle, and she cast the child under one of the shrubs, and she went and sat down a good way off, for she said, Let me not see the death of the child. And God heard the voice of the lad, and the angel of the

Lord called to Hagar out of heaven, saying, What aileth thee, Hagar? fear not. God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is. Arise, lift up the lad, hold him in thy hand, for I will make of him a great nation. And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water."

Thus did he declare himself the Care-taker and Saviour not of the Jews merely, but of the Gentiles. It was he who afterwards declared that he was the living bread which came down from heaven, which he gave for the life of the **WHOLE WORLD**.

Afterwards, in the history of Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, we read of a divine Being who talked with him in a visible intimacy: —

"And it came to pass, as Moses entered into the tabernacle, the cloudy pillar descended and stood at the door of the tabernacle, and Jehovah talked with Moses. And all the people saw the cloudy pillar stand at the tabernacle door, and all the people rose up and worshiped, each man in his tent door. *And Jehovah spake unto Moses, face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend.*"

Some record of this strange conversation is given. Moses was a man of wonderful soul, in whom was the divine yearning; he longed to know more and more of his God, and at last beseeches to have the full beatific vision of the divine nature in its glory; but the answer is: "Thou canst not see my face [in its divine glory], for there shall no man see me and live." That overpowering vision was not for flesh and blood; it would dissolve the frail bonds of mortality and set the soul free, and Moses must yet live, and labor, and suffer.

What an affecting light this interview of Moses sheds on that scene in the New Testament, where, just before his crucifixion, the disciples see their Master in the glory of the heavenly world, and with him Moses and Elijah, "who spake with him of his decease, which he should accomplish at Jerusalem," — Moses, who had been taught by the divine Word in the wilderness how to organize all that system of forms and sacrifices which were to foreshadow and prepare the way for the great Sacrifice — the great Revealer of God to man. We see these noble souls, the two grandest prophets of the Old Testament, in communion with our Lord about that last and final sacrifice which was to fulfill and bring to an end all others.

A little later on, in the Old Testament history, we come to a time recorded in the Book of Judges when the chosen people, settled in the land of Canaan, sunk in worldliness and sin, have forgotten the Lord Jehovah, and as a punishment are left to be bitterly oppressed and harassed by the savage tribes in their neighborhood. The nation was in danger of extinction. The stock from which was to come prophets and apostles, the writers of the Bible which we now read, from which was to come our Lord Jesus Christ, was in danger of being trampled out under the heel of barbarous heathen tribes. It was a crisis needing a deliverer. Physical strength, brute force, was the law of the day, and a deliverer was to be given who could overcome force by superior force.

Again the mysterious stranger appears; we have the account in Judges xiii.

A pious old couple who have lived childless hitherto receive an angelic visitor who announces to them the birth of a deliverer. And the woman came and told her husband, saying, "A man of God came unto me, and his countenance was like the countenance of an angel of God, very terrible; but I asked him not whence he was, neither told he me his name." This man, she goes on to say, had promised a son to them who should deliver Israel from the hand of the Philistines. Manoah then prays to God to grant another interview with the heavenly messenger.

The prayer is heard; the divine Man again appears to them and gives directions for the care of the future child, — directions requiring the most perfect temperance and purity on the part of both mother and child. The rest of the story is better given in the quaint and beautiful words of the Bible: —

"And Manoah said to the angel of Jehovah, I pray thee let us detain thee till we shall have made ready a kid for thee. And the angel of Jehovah said to Manoah,

Though thou detain me I will not eat of thy bread; and if thou wilt offer a burnt offering thou must offer it unto Jehovah. For Manoah knew not that he was an angel of Jehovah. And Manoah said, What is thy name? that when thy sayings come to pass we may do thee honor. And the angel of the Lord said unto him, Why askest thou my name, seeing that it is secret? So Manoah took a kid with a meat offering and offered it upon a rock to the Lord; and the angel did wonderously, and Manoah and his wife looked on. For it came to pass, when the flame went up to heaven from off the altar, that the angel of Jehovah ascended in the flame on the altar, and Manoah and his wife fell on their faces on the ground. And Manoah said, We shall surely die, for we have seen God."

This tender, guiding Power, this long-suffering and pitying Saviour of Israel, appears to us in frequent glimpses through the writings of the prophets.

Isaiah says, "In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the Angel of his Presence saved them; in his love and his pity he redeemed them, and he bore and carried them all the days of old."

It is this thought that gives an inexpressible pathos to the rejection of Christ by the Jews. St. John begins his gospel by speaking of this divine Word, who was with God in the beginning, and was God; that he was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not.

This gives an awful, pathetic meaning to those tears which Christ shed over Jerusalem, and to that last yearning farewell to the doomed city: —

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not."

It gives significance to that passage of Revelation where Christ is called "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."

Not alone in the four years when he ministered on earth was he the suffering Redeemer; he was always, from the foundation of the world, the devoted sacrifice: bearing on his heart the sinning, suffering, wandering race of man, afflicted in their afflictions, bearing their griefs and carrying their sorrows, the friend of the Jew and the Gentile, the seeker for the outcast, the guide of the wanderer, the defender of the helpless, the consoler of the desolate, the self-devoted offering to and for the sins of the world.

In all these revelations of God, one idea is very precious. He reveals himself not as a fixed Fate – a mighty, crushing, inexorable Power – but as a Being relenting, tender, yearning towards the race of man with infinite tenderness. He suffers himself to be importuned; he hides himself that he may be sought, and, although he is omnipotent, though with one touch he might weaken and paralyze human strength, yet he suffers human arms to detain and human importunity to conquer him, and he blesses the man that will not let him go except he bless. On this scene Charles Wesley has written his beautiful hymn beginning, —

"Come, O thou Traveler unknown."

The struggles, the sorrows, and aspirations of the soul for an unknown Saviour have never been more beautifully told.

## II CHRIST IN PROPHECY

In the Old Testament Scriptures we have from the beginning of the world an advent dawn – a rose sky of Promise. He is coming, is the mysterious voice that sounds everywhere, in history, in prophecy, in symbol, type, and shadow. It spreads through all races of men; it becomes an earnest aspiration, a sigh, a moan of struggling humanity, crying out for its Unknown God.

In the Garden of Eden came the first oracle, which declared that the Seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head. This was an intimation, vague yet distinct, that there should come a Deliverer who should break the power of evil. From that hour every mother had hope, and child-bearing was invested with dignity and blessing. When the mother of all brought the first son into the world, she fondly hoped that she had brought forth the Deliverer, and said, "I have gotten the MAN *Jehovah*."

Poor mother! destined to a bitter anguish of disappointment! Thousands of years were to pass away before the second Eve should bring forth the MAN *Jehovah*.

In this earliest period we find in the history of Job the anguish, the perplexities, the despair of the helpless human creature, crushed and bleeding beneath the power of an unknown, mighty Being, whose ways seem cruel and inexplicable, but with whom he feels that expostulation is impossible: —

"Lo, he goeth by me and I see him not; he passeth on also and I perceive him not. Behold, he taketh away, and who can hinder him? who will say unto him, What doest thou? If God will not withdraw his anger, the proud helpers do stoop under him. How then shall I answer him and choose out words to reason with him?"

Job admits that he desires to reason with God to ask some account of his ways. He says: —

"My soul is weary of my life. I will speak in the bitterness of my soul. I will say unto God, Do not condemn me; show me why thou contendest with me. Is it good that thou shouldest oppress, that thou shouldest despise the work of thy hands?"

He then goes through with all the perplexing mysteries of life. He sees the wicked prosperous and successful, and he that had always been devoted to God reduced to the extreme of human misery; he wrestles with the problem; he longs to ask an explanation; but it all comes to one mournful conclusion: —

"He is not a man as I am, that I should answer him, and we should come together in judgment. Neither is there any daysman [arbiter] between us, that might lay his hand on both of us. Let him take his rod away and let not his fear terrify me. Then would I speak; but it is not so with me."

Here we have in a word the deepest want of humanity: a daysman between the infinite God and finite man; a Mediator who should lay his hand on both of them! And then, in the midst of these yearnings and complainings, the Spirit of God, the Heavenly Comforter, bearing witness with Job's spirit, breaks forth in the prophetic song: —

"I know that my Redeemer liveth  
And that he shall stand in the latter days upon the earth.  
And though worms destroy this body,  
Yet in my flesh shall I see God.  
I shall see him for myself and not another.  
My reins are consumed with longing for that day."

As time passes we have the history of one man, called from all the races of men to be the ancestor of this Seed. Abraham, called to leave his native land and go forth sojourning as a pilgrim and stranger on earth, receives a celestial visitor who says: "Abraham, I am the Almighty God. Walk before me and be thou perfect." He exacts of Abraham the extremes of devotion – not only to leave his country, kindred, friends, and be a sojourner in a strange land, but to sacrifice the only son of his heart. And Abraham meets the test without a wavering thought; his trust in God is absolute: and in return he receives the promise, "In THY SEED shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." How Abraham looked upon this promise we are told by our Lord himself. The Jews asked him, "Art thou greater than our father Abraham?" And he answered, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day – he saw it, and was glad."

The same promise was repeated to Jacob in the self-same words, when he lay sleeping in the field of Luz and saw the heavenly vision of the Son of man.

From the time of the first announcement to Abraham his descendants became the recipients of a special divine training, in which every event of their history had a forelooking to this great consummation. They were taken into Egypt, and, after long suffering, delivered from a deadly oppression. In the solemn hour of their deliverance the blood of a spotless lamb – "a lamb without blemish" – was to mark the door-posts of each dwelling with a sign of redemption. "Not a bone of him shall be broken," said the ancient command, referring to this typical sacrifice; and when in a later day the Apostle John stood by the cross of Jesus and saw them break the limbs of the other two victims and leave Jesus untouched, he said, "that it might be fulfilled which was commanded, not a bone of Him shall be broken."

The yearly festival which commemorated this deliverance was a yearly prophecy in every Jewish family of the sinless Redeemer whose blood should be their salvation. A solemn ritual was instituted, every part of which was prophetic and symbolic. A high priest chosen from among his brethren, who could be touched with the feelings of their infirmities, was the only one allowed to enter that mysterious Holy of Holies where were the mercy-seat and the cherubim, the throne of the Invisible God. There, for the most part, unbroken stillness and solitude reigned. Only on one memorable day of the year, while all the congregation of Israel lay prostrate in penitence without, this high priest entered for them with the blood of atonement into the innermost presence of the King Invisible. Purified, arrayed in spotless garments, and bearing on his breast – graven on precious gems – the names of the tribes of Israel, he entered there, a yearly symbol and prophecy of the greater High Priest, who should "not by the blood of bulls and of goats, but by his own blood, enter at once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us."

Thus, by a series of symbols and ceremonies which filled the entire life of the Jew, the whole national mind was turned in an attitude of expectancy towards the future Messiah. In the more elevated and spiritual natures – the poets and the prophets – this was continually bursting forth into distinct predictions. Moses says, in his last message to Israel, "A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you from the midst of your brethren like unto me; unto Him shall ye hearken." Our Lord referred to this prophecy when he said to the unbelieving Jews, "Had ye believed Moses ye would have believed me, for he wrote of me."

The promise made at first to Abraham was afterwards repeated not only to Jacob, but long centuries afterward to his descendant, David, in a solemn, prophetic message, relating first to the reign of Solomon, but ending with these words: "And thy house and thy kingdom shall be established forever before thee. Thy throne shall be established forever." That David understood these words as a promise that the Redeemer should be of his seed is evident from the declaration of St. Peter in Acts ii. 30, where he says that "David being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his loins he would raise up Messiah to sit on his throne, spake thus concerning him."

The Psalms of David are full of heaving, many-colored clouds and mists of poetry, out of which shine here and there glimpses of the mystic future. In the second Psalm we have a majestic drama.

The heathen are raging against Jehovah and his anointed Son. They say, Let us break their bands in sunder and cast away their cords. Then the voice of Jehovah is heard in the tumult, saying calmly, "Yet have I set my king on my holy hill of Zion." Then an angelic herald proclaims: —

"I will declare the decree.  
The Lord hath spoken:  
Thou art my Son;  
This day have I begotten thee:  
Ask of me and I will give the heathen for thine inheritance,  
And the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession."

This mighty king, this glorious defender, is celebrated as the All-Loving One. His reign is to be a reign of truth and love. All the dearest forms of human affection are used to shadow forth what he will be to his people. He is to be the royal bridegroom; his willing people the bride. So, in the forty-fifth Psalm, entitled "A Song of Love," we have the image of a mighty conqueror – radiant, beloved, adored, a being addressed both as God and the Son of God, who goes forth to victory: —

"Thou art fairer than the children of men.  
Grace is poured into thy lips.  
Therefore God hath blessed thee forever.  
Gird thy sword on thy thigh, O most mighty, with thy glory and majesty.  
And in thy majesty ride prosperously because of thy truth and meekness and righteousness.  
Thy right hand shall teach thee terrible things.  
Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever.  
A sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom.  
Thou lovest righteousness and hatest iniquity.  
Therefore God – thy God – hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows."

Then follows a description of the royal bride, the king's daughter, who is all glorious within – her clothing of wrought gold – who with gladness and rejoicing shall be brought to the king to become mother of princes.

It is said by some that this is a marriage hymn for the wedding of a prince. It may have been so originated; but in the mind of the devout Jew every scene and event in life had become significant and symbolical of this greater future. Every deliverer suggested the greater Deliverer; the joy of every marriage suggested the joy of that divine marriage with a heavenly bridegroom.

So the seventy-second Psalm, written originally for Solomon, expands into language beyond all that can be said of any earthly monarch. It was the last poem of David, and the feelings of the king and father rose and melted into a great tide of imagery that belonged to nothing earthly: —

"Yea, all kings shall fall down before him;  
All nations shall serve him.  
He shall deliver the needy when he crieth;  
The poor also, and him that hath no helper.  
He shall spare the poor and needy, and shall save the souls of the needy.  
He shall redeem their soul from deceit and violence,  
And precious shall their blood be in his sight.  
And he shall live, and to him shall be given the gold of Sheba."

Prayer also shall be made for him continually, and daily shall he be praised.  
His name shall endure forever.  
His name shall be continued as long as the sun.  
Men shall be blessed in him.  
All nations shall call him blessed."

But in these same Psalms there are glimpses of a divine sufferer. In the twenty-second Psalm David speaks of sufferings which certainly never happened to himself – which were remarkably fulfilled in the last agonies of Jesus: —

"All they that see me laugh me to scorn.  
They shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying,  
He trusted in God that he would deliver him.  
Let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him.  
I am poured out like water; all my bones are out of joint.  
My heart is like wax – it is melted in my bosom.  
My strength is dried up like a potsherd.  
My tongue cleaveth to my mouth.  
Thou hast brought me into the dust of death.  
For dogs have compassed me,  
The assembly of the wicked have inclosed me;  
They pierced my hands and my feet.  
I may tell all my bones. They look and stare on me.  
They part my garments among them  
And cast lots for my vesture."

In this Psalm, written more than a thousand years before he came into the world, our Lord beheld ever before him the scenes of his own crucifixion; he could see the heartless stare of idle, malignant curiosity around his cross; he could hear the very words of the taunts and revilings, and a part of the language of this Psalm was among his last utterances. While the shadows of the great darkness were gathering around his cross he cried, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" It would seem as if the words so bitterly fulfilled passed through his mind, as one by one the agonies and indignities followed each other, till at last he bowed his head and said, "It is finished."

As time rolled on, this mingled chant of triumph and of suffering swelled clearer and plainer. In the grand soul of Isaiah, the Messiah and his kingdom were ever the outcome of every event that suggested itself. When the kingdom of Judah was threatened by foreign invasion, the prophet breaks out with the promise of a Deliverer: —

"Behold, the Lord himself shall give you a sign. Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bring forth a son and shall call his name Immanuel [God with us]."

Again he bursts forth as if he beheld the triumph as a present reality: —

"Unto us a child is born  
Unto us a son is given.  
The government shall be upon his shoulders.  
His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor,  
Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Of the increase of his government and of peace there shall be no end,  
Upon the throne of David and his kingdom,  
To establish it with justice from henceforth and forever.  
The zeal of the Lord of Hosts will perform this."

Again, a few chapters further on, he sings: —

"There shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse  
A Branch shall grow out of his roots.  
The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him;  
The spirit of wisdom and understanding,  
The spirit of counsel and might,  
The spirit of knowledge, and fear of the Lord.  
With righteousness shall he judge the poor,  
And reprove with equity for the meek of the earth."

Then follow vivid pictures of a golden age on earth, beneath his sway, when all enmities and ferocities even of the inferior animals shall cease, and universal love and joy pervade the earth.

In the fifty-third of Isaiah we have again the sable thread of humiliation and sorrow; the Messiah is to be "despised and rejected of men;" his nation "hide their faces from him;" he "bears their griefs, and carries their sorrows," is "wounded for their transgressions," is "brought as a lamb to the slaughter," is "dumb before his accusers," is "taken from prison to judgment," is "cut off out of the land of the living," "makes his grave with the wicked and with the rich in his death," and thence is "raised again to an endless kingdom."

Thus far the tide of prophecy had rolled; thus distinct and luminous had grown the conception of a future suffering, victorious Lord and leader, when the Jewish nation, for its sins and unfaithfulness, was suffered to go to wreck. The temple was destroyed and the nation swept into captivity in a foreign land.

But they carried everywhere with them the vision of their future Messiah. In their captivity and sufferings their religious feelings became intense, and, wherever they were, the Jews were always powerful and influential men. Daniel, by his divine skill in spiritual insight, became the chief of the Chaldean magi, and his teachings with regard to the future Messiah may be traced in those passages of the Zendavesta which predict his coming, his universal dominion, and the resurrection of the dead. Everywhere through all nations this scattered seed of the Jews touched the spark of desire and aspiration – the longing for a future Redeemer.

In the prophecies of Daniel we find the predictions of the Messiah assuming the clearness of forewritten history. The successive empires of the world are imaged under the symbol of a human body, with a head of gold, a breast of silver, body and thighs of brass, legs and feet of iron. By these types were indicated the Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Greek and Roman nations, with their successive rule. In prophetic vision, also, a stone was without hands cut out of the mountains, and it smote the feet of the image, so that the whole of it passed away like the chaff of the threshing-floor.

How striking this description of that invisible, spiritual force which struck the world in the time of the Roman empire, and before which all the ancient dynasties have vanished!

In the ninth chapter of Daniel, verses 25, 26, 27, we find given the exact time of the coming of the Messiah, of his death, of the subsequent destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans, and the cessation of the Jewish worship and sacrifices. Remembering that Daniel was the head of the Chaldean magi,

we see how it is that their descendants were able to calculate the time of the birth of Christ and come to worship him.<sup>2</sup>

At length the Jews were recalled from captivity and the temple rebuilt. While it was rebuilding prophets encouraged the work with prophecies of the Lord who should appear in it. The prophet Haggai (ii. 3-9) thus speaks to those who depreciate the new temple by comparing it with the old: —

"Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? Yet now be strong, all ye people of the land, and work, for I am with you, saith the Lord of Hosts. For thus saith the Lord: Yet a little while and I will shake the heavens and earth, the sea and the dry land, and the Desire of all nations shall come, and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord. The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, for in this house will I give peace, saith the Lord of Hosts."

The prophecies of Zechariah, which belonged to the same period and had the same object, — to encourage the rebuilding of the second temple, — are full of anticipation of the coming Messiah. The prophet breaks forth into song like a bird of the morning: —

"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion;  
Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem:  
Behold, thy king cometh unto thee.  
He is just and hath salvation;  
He is lowly, riding upon an ass —  
Upon a colt, the foal of an ass."

Again he breaks forth in another strain: —

"Awake, O sword, against my Shepherd,  
Against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of Hosts.  
Smite the Shepherd,  
And the sheep shall be scattered."

We remember that these words were quoted by our Lord to his disciples the night before his execution, when he was going forth to meet his murderers. A hundred or so of years later, the prophet Malachi says: —

"Behold, I send my messenger.  
He shall prepare the way before me.  
The Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to his temple:  
Even the messenger of the covenant, in whom ye delight;  
But who may abide the day of his coming?  
Who shall stand when He appeareth?  
For, like a refiner's fire shall He be,  
And like fullers' soap.  
He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver.  
He shall purify the sons of Levi."

---

<sup>2</sup> M. Lenormant says in *The Magic of the Chaldees*: "The more one advances in the understanding of the cuneiform text, the more one sees the necessity of revising the condemnation too prematurely uttered against the Book of Daniel by the German Exegetical School. Without doubt, the use of certain Greek words serves to show that it has passed through the hands of some editor since the time of Alexander. But the substance of it is much more ancient — is imprinted with a perfectly distinct Babylonian tinge, and the picture of life in the court of Nabuchodonosor and his successors has an equal truthfulness which could not have been attained at a later period."

How remarkably this prophecy describes the fiery vehemence and energy of our Lord's first visit to the temple, when he drove out the money-changers and completely cleansed the holy place of unseemly traffic!

With this prophet the voice of prediction ceases. Let us for a moment look back and trace its course. First, the vague promise of a Deliverer, born of a woman; then, a designation of the race from which he is to be born; then of the tribe; then of the family; then the very place of his birth is predicted – Bethlehem-Ephratah being mentioned to discriminate it from another Bethlehem. Then come a succession of pictures of a Being concerning whom the most opposite things are predicted. He is to be honored, adored, beloved; he is to be despised and rejected – his nation hide their faces from him. He is to be terrible and severe as a refiner's fire; he is to be so gentle that a bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench. He is to be seized and carried from prison to judgment; he is surrounded by the wicked; his hands and feet are pierced, his garments divided; they cast lots for his vesture; he is united by his death both with the wicked and with the rich; he is cut off from the land of the living. He is cut off, but not for himself; his kingdom is to be an everlasting kingdom; he is to have dominion from sea to sea, and of the increase of his government and of peace there is to be no end.

How strange that for ages these conflicting and apparently contradictory oracles had been accumulating, until finally came One who fulfilled them all. Is not this indeed the Christ – the Son of God?

### III

## THE CRADLE OF BETHLEHEM

We should have supposed that when the time came for the entrance of the great Hero upon the stage of this world, magnificent preparations would be made to receive him. A nation had been called and separated from all tribes of earth that he might be born of them, and it had been their one special mission to prepare for the coming of this One, their Head and King, in whom the whole of their organization – laws, teachings, and prophecies – was to be fulfilled. Christ was the end for which the tabernacle was erected and the temple built, for whom were the Holy of Holies, the altars, and the sacrifices. He was the Coming One for whom priests and prophets had been for hundreds of years looking.

What should we have expected of divine wisdom when the glorious hour approached? We should have thought that the news would be sent to the leaders of the great national council of the Sanhedrim, to the High Priest and elders, that their Prince was at hand. Doubtless we should suppose that the nation, apprised of his coming, would have made ready his palace and have been watching at its door to do honor to their newborn King.

Far otherwise is the story as we have it.

In the poorest, most sordid, most despised village of Judæa dwelt, unknown and neglected, two members of the decayed and dethroned royal family of Judæa, – Joseph the carpenter and Mary his betrothed. Though every circumstance of the story shows the poverty of these individuals, yet they were not peasants. They were of royal lineage, reduced to the poverty and the simple life of the peasants. The Jews, intensely national, cherished the tradition of David their warrior and poet prince; they sang his Psalms, they dwelt on his memory, and those persons, however poor and obscure, who knew that they had his blood in their veins were not likely to forget it.

There have been times in the history of Europe when royal princes, the heirs of thrones, have sojourned in poverty and obscurity, earning their bread by the labor of their hands. But the consciousness of royal blood and noble birth gave to them a secret largeness of view and nobility of feeling which distinguished them from common citizens.

The Song of Mary given in St. Luke shows the tone of her mind; shows her a woman steeped in the prophetic spirit and traditions, in the Psalms of her great ancestor, and herself possessing a lofty poetic nature.

We have the story of the birth of Christ in only two of the Evangelists. In Matthew we have all the facts and incidents such as must have been derived from Joseph, and in Luke we have those which could only have been told by Mary. She it is who must have related to St. Luke the visit of the angel and his salutation to her. She it is who tells of the state of her mind when those solemn mysterious words first fell upon her ear: —

"Hail thou, highly favored! The Lord is with thee: Blessed art thou among women!"

It is added, —

"And when she saw him she was troubled and cast about in her mind what manner of salutation this should be."

Only Mary could have told the interior state of her mind, the doubts, the troubles, the mental inquiries, known only to herself. The rest of the interview, the magnificent and solemn words of the angel, in the nature of things could have come to the historian only through Mary's narrative.

"Thou shalt conceive 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 forever, and of his kingdom there shall be no end."

In St. Matthew we have the history of the hesitation of Joseph, his manly delicacy and tenderness for his betrothed wife, and the divine message to him in a dream; all of which are things that could have been known only through his own narration.

We find also in this history, whose facts must have come from Joseph, a table of genealogy tracing his descent back to David, while in the account given by Mary in St. Luke there is another and different table of genealogy. The probable inference on the face of it would be that the one is the genealogy of Joseph and the other of Mary; and it confirms this supposition to find that she was spoken of in Rabbinic writings of an early period as the daughter of Heli,<sup>3</sup> who concludes the genealogy given in Luke, and on this supposition would be the father of Mary and grandfather of Jesus. Moreover, as the angel himself in announcing the birth of Christ laid special stress upon the fact that his mother was of the house of David, it is quite probable that the genealogy which proved that descent was very precious in Mary's eyes, and that this is therefore imbedded in the account which St. Luke derives from her, as the very chief treasure of her life. That genealogical record was probably the one hoarded gem of her poverty and neglect – like a crown jewel concealed in the humble cottage of an exiled queen.

When the conviction was brought home to both these hidden souls that their house was to be the recipient of this greatest of all honors, we can easily see how it must have been a treasury of secret and wonderful emotions and contemplations between them. A world of lofty thought and feeling from that hour belonged to those two of all the world, separating them far as heaven is above the earth from the sordid neighborhood of Nazareth. Every tie which connected them with the royal house of David must have been awakened to intense vitality. All the prophecies with regard to the future Messiah must have blazed with a new radiance in the firmament of their thoughts. The decree from Cæsar that all the world should be taxed, and the consequent movement towards a census of the Jewish nation, must have seemed to them a divine call and intimation to leave the village of Nazareth and go to their ancestral town, where prophecy had told them that the Messiah was to be born: —

"And thou Bethlehem-Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall come a Governor which shall rule my people Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting."

On this magnificent mystery were these two poor, obscure, simple people pondering in their hearts as they took their journey over the picturesque hill-country towards the beautiful little town of Bethlehem, the village of their fathers; Bethlehem, the city of the loving Ruth, and her descendant, the chivalrous poet king, David.

It seems they went there poor and without acquaintance, casting themselves in simple faith on the protection of God. The caravanserai of those days bore more resemblance to camping-huts than anything suggested by our modern inn. There was a raised platform which gave to the traveler simply space to spread his bed and lie down, while below this was the portion allotted to the feeding and accommodation of the animals.

When these two guests arrived the space allotted to travelers was all taken up, and a shelter had to be arranged in the part allotted to the animals. We are so accustomed to look at that cradle in Bethlehem through the mists of reverential tradition that we have ceased to realize what a trial and humiliation it was to these children of a royal race to find themselves outcasts and homeless in the city of their fathers – in the very hour when home and its comfort were most needed. We must remember they had to live by faith as well as we. Though an angel had announced this coming child

---

<sup>3</sup> Lightfoot, in his notes on Luke iii., maintains this theory, and quotes in support of it three passages from the Jerusalem Talmud, folio 77, 4, where Mary the mother of Jesus is denounced as the *daughter of Heli*, and mother of a pretender. The same view is sustained by Paulus, Spanheim, and Lange.

as the King of Israel, still their faith must have been severely tried to find themselves, as the hour of his birth approached, unwelcomed, forlorn, and rejected by men, in the very city of David.

The census in which they came to have their names enrolled was the last step in the humiliation of their nation; it was the preparation for their subjugation and taxation as a conquered tribe under the Roman yoke: and they, children of the royal house of David, were left to touch the very lowest descent of humiliation, outcasts from among men, glad to find a resting-place with the beasts of the stall.

Christ is called the Morning Star, and truly he rose in the very darkest hour of the night. The Friend of the outcast, the Care-taker of the neglected, the poor man's Helper, must needs be born thus.

But was there no message? Yes. In those very hills and valleys of Bethlehem where David kept his father's sheep were still shepherds abiding. The Psalms of David were there the familiar melodies; they lived by the valley and hill, as when he sang of old, —

"The Lord is my Shepherd;  
I shall not want.  
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures;  
He leadeth me beside the still waters."

These shepherds probably were poor men of a devout and simple faith, men who longed and prayed and waited for the consolation of Israel. Their daily toil was ennobled by religious associations. Jehovah himself was addressed as the

"Shepherd of Israel;  
He that leadeth Joseph like a flock;  
He that dwelleth between the cherubims."

It was to such souls as these, patient, laborious, prayerful, that the message came; that the Good Shepherd – the Shepherd and Bishop of Souls – was born. No comment can brighten or increase the solemn beauty of those simple words in which this story is told: —

"And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them; and they were afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you: Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling-clothes, lying in a manger.

"And 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 toward men.

"And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.

"And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them."

They received the reward of faith; having heard the heavenly message, they believed and acted upon it. They did not stop to question or reason about it. They did not say, "How can this be?" but "Let us go even unto Bethlehem and see this thing which is come to pass." And so it was that they were rewarded by seeing and hearing the wonders "as it was told unto them."

The visit of these simple, confiding souls doubtless cheered the patient hearts of the humble outcasts, and strengthened their faith.

If now it be asked, Why was all this so? we have only to answer that heaven is a very different world from our earth, and that heavenly ways of viewing people and things are wholly above those of earth. The apostle says that the foolishness of God is wiser than man, and the weakness of God is stronger than man; that the things that are highly esteemed among men are abominations in the sight of God.

When a new king and a new kingdom were to be set up on earth, no pomp of man, no palace made with hands, was held worthy of him; few were the human hearts deemed worthy of the message, and these were people that the world knew not of – simple-minded, sincere, loving, prayerful people.

The priests and scribes were full of national pride and bitterness, burning for revenge on the Romans, longing for conquest and power. They were impatiently waiting for the Leader whose foot should be on the necks of their enemies. They had no sense of sin, no longing for holiness, no aspirations for a Spiritual Deliverer; and therefore no message was sent to them.

But to the simple-minded Joseph the angel said, "Thou shalt call his name Jesus (Saviour) for he shall save his people from their sins." Not from the Romans but from their sins he came to save, and the message of his coming was to humble souls, who wanted this kind of salvation.

But there was a fitness furthermore in these circumstances. Up to this time the poor and the unfortunate had been the despised of the earth. It had been predicted again and again that the Messiah should be the especial Friend of the poor: —

"He shall deliver the needy when he crieth,  
The poor and him that hath no helper.  
He shall spare the soul of the needy,  
And precious shall their blood be in his sight."

As a mother when seeking a lost and helpless child, outcast in some den of misery, would pass by palaces and refuse the shelter of luxurious roofs, to share the poverty of her beloved, so the poor man's Friend and Lord chose to come in the hut and the stable rather than in the palace, that he might be known forever as the God of the poor, the Patron of the neglected, and the Shepherd of the lost.

## IV THE BLESSED WOMAN

There was one woman whom the voice of a divine Messenger, straight from heaven, pronounced highly favored. In what did this favor consist?

Of noble birth, of even royal lineage, she had fallen into poverty and obscurity. The great, brilliant, living world of her day knew her as the rushing equipages and palatial mansions of our great cities know the daughters of poor mechanics in rural towns.

There was plenty of splendor, and rank, and fashion in Jerusalem then. Herod the Great was a man of cultivation and letters, and beautified the temple with all sorts of architectural embellishments; and there were High Priests, and Levites, and a great religious aristocracy circling about its precincts, all of whom, if they thought of any woman as highly favored of heaven, would have been likely to think of somebody quite other than the simple country girl of Nazareth. Such an one as she was not in all their thoughts. Yet she was *the* highly favored woman of the world; the crowned queen of women; the One whose lot – above that of all that have lived woman's life, before or since – was blessed.

The views adopted in the Roman Church with respect to this one Woman of women have tended to deprive the rest of the world of a great source of comfort and edification by reason of the opposite extreme to which Protestant reaction has naturally gone.

John Knox was once taken on board a ship manned, as he says, by Popish sailors, who gave into his hand an image of the Virgin Mary and wanted to compel him to kiss it. Stout John tossed it overboard, saying, "Let our Lady now save herself; she is light enough, let her learn to swim." To have honored the Virgin Mary, even in thought, was shrunk from by the Protestants of those times as an approach to idolatry. An image or a picture of her in a Puritan house would have been considered an approach to the sin of Achan. Truth has always had the fate of the shuttlecock between the conflicting battledoors of controversy.

This is no goddess crowned with stars, but something nobler, purer, fairer, more appreciable – the One highly favored and blessed among Women.

The happiness of Mary's lot was peculiar to womanhood. It lay mostly in the sphere of family affection. Mary had in this respect a lot whose blessedness was above every other mother. She had as her child the loveliest character that ever unfolded through childhood and youth to manhood. He was entirely her own. She had a security in possessing him such as is not accorded to other mothers. She knew that the child she adored was not to die till he had reached man's estate – she had no fear that accident, or sickness, or any of those threatening causes which give sad hours to so many other mothers, would come between him and her.

Neither was she called to separate from him. The record shows that he was with his parents until their journey to Jerusalem, when he was twelve years old; and then, after his brief absence of three days when he was left behind, and found in the temple disputing with the doctors, we are told that "he went down to Nazareth and was subject unto them."

These words are all that cover eighteen years of the purest happiness ever given to mortal woman. To love, to adore, to possess the beloved object in perfect security, guarded by a divine promise – this blessedness was given to but one woman of all the human race. That peaceful home in Nazareth, overlooked by all the great, gay world, how many happy hours it had! Day succeeded day, weeks went to months, and months into years, and this is all the record: "Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man."

Looking at Jesus as a mere human being, a historical character, as some do, the one great peculiarity of him is the intensity of the personal affection he has been able to inspire. The Apostles give him one title which was his above all the other children of men, "The Beloved." Christ has been

and now is beloved, as no other human being ever was. Others have been good men, – true men, benefactors of their race, – but when they died their personality faded from the earth.

Tell a Hottentot or a Zulu the story of Socrates, and it excites no very deep emotion; but, for eighteen hundred years, Hottentots, Zulus, South Sea Islanders and savages, Greenlanders, – men, women, and children in every land, with every variety of constitutional habit, – have conceived such an ardent, passionate, personal love to Jesus of Nazareth that they have been ready to face torture and death for his sake.

"It is not for me to covet things visible or invisible," said Polycarp, on his way to martyrdom, "if only I may obtain Jesus Christ. The fire, the cross, the rush of wild beasts, the tearing asunder of bones, the fracture of limbs, and the grinding to powder of the whole body, let these, the devil's torments, come upon me, provided only that I obtain Jesus Christ."

So felt the Christians of the first ages, and time does not cool the ardor. There are at this present hour hundreds of thousands of obscure men and women, humble artisans, ignorant negroes, to whom Christ is dearer than life, and who would be capable of just this grand devotion. It is not many years since that in the Island of Madagascar Christian converts were persecuted, and there were those who met death for Christ's sake with all the triumphant fervor of primitive ages. Jesus has been the one man of whom it has been possible to say to people of all nations, ages, and languages, "Whom having not seen ye love, and in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory."

If we should embody our idea of the Son with whom Mary lived in secure intimacy for thirty years, we should call him Love, itself. He was not merely lovely, but he was love. He had a warming, creative power as to love. He gave birth to new conceptions of love; to a fervor, a devotion, a tenderness, of which before the human soul scarcely knew its own capacity.

Napoleon asserted the divinity of Jesus from the sole fact of his wonderful power of producing love. "I know men," he said, "and I know Jesus was not a man; – eighteen hundred years ago he died defeated, reviled, and yet at this hour there are thousands all over the world who would die for him. I am defeated and overthrown, and who cares for me now? Who fights, who conquers for me? What an abyss between my misery and the triumph of Jesus!"

The blessedness of Mary was that she was the one human being who had the right of ownership and intimate oneness with the Beloved. For thirty years Jesus had only the task of living an average, quiet, ordinary human life. He was a humble artisan, peacefully working daily for the support of his mother. He was called from her by no public duty; he was hers alone. When he began his public career he transcended these limits. Then he declared that every soul that heard the will of God, and did it, should be to him as his mother – a declaration at which every Christian should veil his face in awe and gratitude.

We may imagine the peace, the joy, the serenity of that household of which Jesus was the centre. He read and explained the Scriptures, and he prayed with them, in such blessed words as those that are recorded in St. John's Gospel. In this life of simplicity and poverty he taught them that sweet and sacred secret of a peaceful daily looking to God for food and raiment that can be learned only by the poor and dependent. He made labor holy by choosing it as his lot.

Many little incidents in Christ's life show the man of careful domestic habits. He was in all things methodical and frugal. The miraculous power he possessed never was used to surround him with any profusion. He would have the fragments of the feast picked up and stored in the baskets, "that nothing should be lost." His illustrations show the habits of a frugal home. His parable of the kingdom of heaven, likened to the leaven hidden in three measures of meal, gives us to believe that doubtless he had often watched his mother in the homely process of bread-making. The woman, who, losing one piece of money from her little store, lights a candle and searches diligently, brings to our mind the dwelling of the poor where every penny has its value. His illustrations from husbandry – ploughing, sowing, growing, the lost sheep, the ox fallen into the pit, the hen and her chickens – all

show a familiarity and a kind sympathy with the daily habits and life interests of the poor. Many little touches indicate, also, the personal refinement and delicacy of his habits, the order and purity that extended to all his ways. While he repressed self-indulgence and the profusion of extravagant luxury, he felt keenly and justified bravely that profusion of the heart that delights in costliness as an expression of love.

There seems to be reason to think that the retirement and stillness of the peasant life in Nazareth, its deeply hidden character, was peculiarly suited to the constitutional taste both of Jesus and his mother.

Mary seems, from the little we see of her, to have been one of those silent, brooding women who seek solitude and meditation, whose thoughts are expressed only confidentially to congenial natures. There is every evidence that our Lord's individual and human nature was in this respect peculiarly sympathetic with that of his mother. The prophecy of Isaiah predicts this trait of his character: "He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street." In the commencement of his ministry we find the same avoidance of publicity. He hushed the zeal of his disciples. He wrought miracles with injunctions of secrecy – "See thou tell no man." The rush of sensational popularity seemed especially distasteful to him, and we find him after a little retiring from it. "Come ye with me into a desert place and rest awhile," he says to his disciples, "for there were so many coming and going that they found no leisure so much as to eat."

Thus, the retirement of the Garden of Gethsemane – where it is said Jesus oftentimes resorted with his disciples – and the quietude of the family of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus at Bethany, seemed to be especially attractive to him. Indeed, so great a desire had he for quiet and peace, and for the calm of that congenial thought and communion that can be had with but a few, that his public life must be regarded as a constant act of self-abnegation. It was as foreign to him to be out in the hot glare and dust of publicity, and to battle in the crowded ways of life, as to the most gentle woman. Divine Love was ever, in this bustling, noisy, vulgar, outward life, lonely, and a stranger. "He was in the world," says St. John, "and the world was made by him, but the world knew him not."

There was one woman of all women to whom it was given to know him perfectly, entirely, intimately – to whom his nature was knit in the closest possible union and identity. He was bone of her bone and flesh of her flesh – his life grew out of her immortal nature. We are led to see in our Lord a peculiarity as to the manner of his birth which made him more purely sympathetic with his mother than any other son of woman. He had no mortal father. All that was human in him was her nature; it was the union of the divine nature with the nature of a pure woman. Hence there was in Jesus more of the pure feminine element than in any other man. It was the feminine element exalted and taken in union with divinity. Robertson has a very interesting sermon on this point, showing how the existence of this feminine element in the character of Jesus supplies all that want in the human heart to which it has been said the worship of the Virgin Mother was adapted. Christ, through his intimate relationship with this one highly favored among women, had the knowledge of all that the heart of man or woman can seek for its needs.

There is in the sacred narrative a reticence in regard to the mother of Jesus which would seem to bear very significantly upon any theories of their mutual relations, and especially upon their present connection in spiritual matters – the idea that Mary, as Mother of God, retains in heaven authority over her son, and that he can deny her nothing. St. John takes care to state specifically the scene in Cana of Galilee where Jesus informs his mother that, in his divine relations and duties, her motherly relation has no place. "Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come."

The address, though not in the connection wanting in respect, or so abrupt as it appears in the translation, was still very decided, and was undoubtedly one of those declarations meant not only for her but for mankind. In the same spirit are his words where, in his public ministrations, word was brought to him that his mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to see him: —

"Who is my mother, and who are my brethren? And he looked around on them that sat about him, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren. For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother and sister and mother."

From that noble utterance, the Song of Mary, – retained by the church as a Magnificat, – there is evidence of a soul not only exalted by genius and enthusiasm, but steeped in the traditions of ancient prophecy. It is so like the Psalms of David that a verse of it, if read out casually, might seem to be taken from them. There is no doubt that a soul like this, when possessed of the great secret of prophecy, devoted itself with ardor to all in the Hebrew Scriptures which foreshadowed her son's career. She was the first teacher of the child Jesus in the Law and the Prophets. One of Raphael's most beautiful conceptions of her represents her sitting thoughtfully, holding the hand of the infant Jesus, while the roll of the prophecies lies in her lap, and her eyes are fixed on the distance as in deep thought. There is a similar picture of her by Palma Vecchio. The communings of Christ and his mother on these subjects must have been so long and so intimate that she more calmly and clearly knew exactly whither his life was tending than did his disciples. She had been forewarned in Daniel of the time when the Messiah was to be cut off, but not for himself; she understood, doubtless, the deep, hidden meaning of the Psalm that describes the last agonies, the utter abandonment of her son.

There is in her whole character a singular poise and calmness. When the Angel of the Annunciation appeared to her she was not overcome by the presence of a spiritual being as Daniel was, who records that "he fell on his face and there was no strength in him." Mary, in calm and firm simplicity, looks the angel in the face, and ponders what the wonderful announcement may mean. When she finds that it really does mean that she, a poor lonely maiden, is the chosen woman of all the human race – the gainer of the crown of which every Jewish woman had dreamed for ages – she is still calm. She does not sink under the honor, she is not confused or overcome, but answers with gentle submission, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it unto me according to his word."

Yet the words of the Magnificat show a keen sense of the honor and favor done her. She exults in it with an innocent heartiness of simplicity. "He hath regarded the low estate of his handmaid, for from henceforth all nations shall call me blessed."

It is remarkable that Mary was never in any one instance associated in public work with Jesus. She was not among the women who are mentioned as following and ministering unto him. She was, it seems, in Jerusalem at the last Passover of our Lord, but it was not with her, or at her table, that he prepared to eat the Passover. He did that as master in his own house, with a family of little children of his own choosing. Mary was not at the first Eucharistic feast. Undoubtedly there was foreknowledge and divine design in all this, and doubtless Jesus and Mary were so completely one in will and purpose that she was of perfect accord with him in all these arrangements. There are souls so perfectly attuned to each other, with such an exact understanding and sympathy, that personal presence no longer becomes a necessity. They are always with each other in spirit, however outwardly separated. But we find her with him once more, openly and visibly, in the hour when all others forsook him. The delicacy of woman may cause her to shrink from the bustle of public triumph, but when truth and holiness are brought to public scorn she is there to defend, to suffer, to die.

Can we conceive what this mob was, that led Jesus forth to death? Mobs in our day are brutal, but what were they then? Consider what the times must have been when scourging was an ordinary punishment for criminals, and crucifixion an ordinary mode of execution; what were the sights, the sounds, the exhibitions of brutality among which Mary and the women friends of Jesus followed him to the cross!

And Mary did not faint – did not sink. She did not fall to the earth when an angel predicted her glory; she did not fall now, when the sword had gone through her heart. It is all told in one word, "Now there *stood* by the cross of Jesus his mother." The last word that Jesus spoke to any mortal ear was to commend her to his dearest friend.

After the resurrection Mary appears once more among the disciples, waiting and praying for a descent of the Holy Ghost – and then in the sacred record we hear of her no more.

But enough is recorded of her to make her forever dear to all Christian hearts. That Mary is now with Jesus, that there is an intimacy and sympathy between her soul and his such as belong to no other created being, seems certain. Nor should we suffer anything to prevent that just love and veneration which will enable us to call her Blessed, and to look forward to meeting her in heaven as one of the brightest joys of that glorious world.

## V THE HOLY CHILDHOOD

In the first recorded public prayer of the Apostles after the resurrection of our Lord he is called "Thy Holy Child Jesus."

The expression is a very beautiful one if we couple it with the Master's declaration that the greatest in the kingdom of heaven is the most like a little child, and that to become as a little child is the first step toward fitness for the knowledge of spiritual things.

There has been in this world one rare flower of Paradise, – a holy childhood growing up gradually into a holy manhood, and always retaining in mature life the precious, unstained memories of perfect innocence. The family at Nazareth was evidently a secluded one. Persons of such an elevated style of thought as Joseph and Mary, conscious of so solemn a destiny and guarding with awe the treasure and hope of a world, must have been so altogether different from the ordinary peasants of Nazareth that there could have been little more than an external acquaintance between them. They were undoubtedly loving, gentle, and tender to every one, full of sympathy for trouble and of kind offices in sickness, but they carried within their hearts a treasury of thoughts, emotions, and hopes, which could not be perceived by those whose spiritual eyes had never been opened. It is quite evident from the surprise that the Nazarenes manifested when Christ delivered his first sermon among them that they had never seen anything unusual in the family, and that Christ himself had been living among them only as the carpenter's son. This case is not peculiar. The great artist or poet often grows to manhood without one of his townspeople suspecting who he is, and what world he lives in. Milton or Raphael might so have grown up unknown in a town of obscure fishermen.

The apocryphal gospels have busied themselves in inventing legends of this child-life of Jesus. Nothing so much shows the difference between the false and the true as these apocryphal gospels compared with the real. Jesus is represented there as a miraculous child, using supernatural power for display among his schoolmates and for the gratification of childish piques and resentments.

The true gospel gives but one incident of the child-life of Jesus, and that just at the time when childhood is verging into youth; for the rest, we are left to conjecture.

We are told that his infancy was passed in the land of Egypt. Jesus was the flower of his nation, – he was the blossom of its history, – and therefore it seemed befitting that his cradle should be where was the cradle of his great forerunner, Moses, on the banks of the Nile. The shadows of the Pyramids, built by the labors of his ancestors, were across the land of his childhood, and the great story of their oppression and deliverance must have filled the thoughts and words of his parents. So imbued was the Jewish mind with the habit of seeing in everything in their history the prophecy and type of the great Fulfiller, that St. Matthew speaks of this exile in Egypt as having occurred that the type might find completeness, and that Israel, in the person of its Head and Representative, might a second time be called out of Egypt: —

"That it might be fulfilled that was spoken of the Lord by the prophet,  
"Out of Egypt have I called my son."

We do not know with any definiteness the length of this sojourn in Egypt, nor how much impression the weird and solemn scenery and architecture of Egypt may have made upon the susceptible mind of the child; but to the parents it must have powerfully and vividly recalled all that ancient and prophetic literature which in every step pointed to their wonderful son. The earliest instructions of Jesus must have been in this history and literature of his own nation – a literature unique, poetic, and sublime. But we have no tidings of him till that time in his history when, according to the customs of his people, he was of age to go up to the great national festival at Jerusalem.

The young Jewish boy was instructed all the earlier years of his life in view of this great decisive step, which, like confirmation in the Christian Church, ranked him as a fully admitted member of the house of Israel. It was customary to travel to Jerusalem in large companies or caravans, beguiling the way with hymns of rejoicing as they drew nigh to the holy city. Jesus, probably, was one of many boys who for the first time were going up to their great national festival.

One incident only of this journey is given, but that a very striking one. After the feast was over, when the caravan was returning, they passed a day's journey on their way without perceiving that the child was not among the travelers. This – in a large company of kinsfolk and acquaintance, and where Jesus might have been, as he always afterward seemed to be, a great personal favorite – was quite possible. His parents, trusting him wholly, and feeling that he was happy among friends, gave themselves no care till the time of the evening encampment. Then, discovering their loss, they immediately retraced their steps the next day to Jerusalem, inquiring for him vainly among their acquaintances. They at last turned their steps toward the outer courts of the temple, where was the school of the learned Rabbins who explained the law of God. There, seated at their feet, eager and earnest, asking them questions and hearing their answers, the child Jesus had awakened to a new and deeper life, and become so absorbed as to forget time, place, friends, and everything else in the desire to understand the Holy Word.

It is a blot upon this beautiful story to speak of Jesus as "disputing" with the teachers of his nation, or setting himself up to instruct them. His position was that of a learner; we are not told that he asserted anything, but that he listened and asked questions. The questions of a pure child are often the most searching that can be asked; the questions of the holy child Jesus must have penetrated to the very deepest of divine mysteries. Those masterly discussions of the sayings of the Rabbins, which years after appeared in the Sermon on the Mount, may have sprung from seeds thus dropped into the childish mind.

But, while he is thus absorbed and eager, his soul burning with newly kindled enthusiasm, suddenly his parents, agitated and distressed, lay hold on him with tender reproach: "Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? Behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing."

Jesus answers, as he so often did in after life, as speaking almost unconsciously out of some higher sphere, and in higher language than that of earth: "How is it that ye sought me? Did ye not know that I must be about my Father's business?"

It seemed to say, "Why be alarmed? is not this my Father's house; is not this study of his law my proper work; and where should I be but here?"

But immediately it is added, "He went down to Nazareth and was subject to them." Even Christ pleased not himself; the holiest fire, the divinest passion, was made subject to the heavenly order, and immediately he yielded to the father and mother whom God had made his guides an implicit obedience.

We have here one glimpse of a consuming ardor, a burning enthusiasm, which lay repressed and hidden for eighteen years more, till the Father called him to speak.

That simple, natural utterance in the child's mouth – "My Father" – shows the secret of the holy peace which kept him happy in waiting. The Father was a serene presence, an intimate and inward joy. In the beautiful solitudes about Nazareth the divine benediction came down upon him: —

"I will be as the dew to Israel:  
He shall grow as the lily,  
And cast forth his roots as Lebanon."

These two natural symbols seem fittest to portray the elements of that holy childhood which grew to holiest manhood. They give us, as its marked characteristics, the shining purity of the lily and the grand strength and stability of the cedars of Lebanon.

## VI GENTILE PROPHECIES OF CHRIST

"Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judæa, in the days of Herod the king, behold there came wise men to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him."

Was the Messiah to be the King of the Jews alone? No; he was for the world; he was the Good Shepherd of nations, and declared that he had "other sheep, not of this fold."

It seems to be most striking that, in the poetical and beautiful account of the birth of Jesus, there is record of two distinct classes who come to pay him homage – not only the simple-minded and devout laboring people of the Jews, but also the learned sages of the Gentiles.

There are constant intimations throughout the Old Testament that God's choice of the Jews was no favoritism; that he had not forgotten other races, but was still the God and Father of mankind; and that he chose Israel not to aggrandize one people, but to make that people his gift-bearers to the whole world.

There are distinct evidences in the Old Testament that the coming Saviour was caring for others beside the Jewish race. Witness his gracious promise to the slave Hagar that he would bless her descendants. In the very family line from which Messiah was to be born a loving and lovely Moabite woman was suffered to be introduced as the near ancestress of King David, and the name of the Gentile Ruth stands in the genealogy of Jesus as a sort of intimation that he belonged not to a race but to the world. In a remarkable passage of Isaiah (xliv. 28, xlv. 1, 4, 5) Jehovah, proclaiming his supreme power, declares himself to be He

"That saith of Cyrus —  
He is my shepherd,  
He shall perform all my pleasure.  
Even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built;  
And to the Temple, Thy foundations shall be laid.  
Thus saith the Lord to his anointed,  
To Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden.

For Jacob my servant's sake,  
For Israel mine elect,  
I have called thee by my name:  
I have surnamed thee, *though thou hast not known me.*  
I am the Lord, and there is none else, there is no God beside me:  
I girded thee, though thou hast not known me."

The Babylonian captivity answered other purposes beside the punishment and restoration of the Jewish nation to the worship of the true God. It was a sort of prophetic "Epiphany," in which the Messianic aspirations of the Jews fell outside of their own nation, like sparks of fire on those longings which were common to the human race. Even the Jewish prophet spoke of the Messiah as "The Desire of all Nations."

And this desire and the hope of its fulfillment were burning fervently in the souls of all the best of the Gentile nations; for not among the Jews alone, but among all the main races and peoples of antiquity, have there been prophecies and traditions more or less clear of a Being who should redeem the race of man from the power of evil and bring in an era of peace and love.

The yearning, suffering heart of humanity formed to itself such a conception out of its own sense of need. Poor helpless man felt himself an abandoned child, without a Father, in a scene of warring and contending forces. The mighty, mysterious, terrible God of nature was a being that he could not understand, felt unable to question. Job in his hour of anguish expressed the universal longing: —

"Oh that I knew where I might find him! I would come even to his seat, I would order my cause before him, I would fill my mouth with arguments. Would he plead against me with his great power? Nay, but he would put strength in me."

And again: —

"He is not a man as I am that I should answer him, and that we should come together in judgment. Neither is there any daysman that might lay his hand on both of us."

It was for this Mediator, both divine and human, who should interpret the silence of God to man, who should be his Word to his creatures, that all humanity was sighing. Therefore it was that the first vague promise was a seed of hope, not only in the Jewish race, but in all other nations of the earth.

One of the earliest and most beautiful prophecies of the coming Messiah is from the heathen astrologer, Balaam: —

"Balaam the son of Beor saith,  
The man whose eyes are open, saith,  
He which heard the word of God  
And knew the knowledge of the Most High,  
Which saw the vision of the Almighty,  
Falling into a trance and having his eyes open:  
I shall see Him, but not now.  
I shall behold Him, but not nigh.  
There shall come a Star out of Jacob,  
A sceptre shall rise out of Israel.  
Out of Jacob shall come He that shall have dominion!"

Of late there has been discovered in Nineveh a large work on the system of magic of the Chaldee soothsayers, written on tiles of baked clay, in the "arrow-head" characters. Here we have a minute account, of the Chaldeans – the astrologers and the sorcerers spoken of in Daniel – with specimens of their liturgic forms and invocations. M. Lenormant, who has issued a minute account of this work with translations of many parts of it, gives an interesting account of the religious ideas of the Chaldees in the very earliest period of antiquity, as old or older than that of the soothsayer Balaam.

He says the supreme divinity, whom they called EA, was regarded as too remote and too vast to be approached by human prayer, and that he was to be known only through the medium of another divinity, his first-begotten Son, to whom is given a name signifying the Benefactor of Man. The prayers and ascriptions to this divinity remind us of the Old Testament addresses to the Messiah. The Hebrew poet says: —

"Of old hast thou laid the foundations of the earth,  
And the heavens are the work of thy hands."

The ancient invocation upon the tiles of Nineveh addressed to the Mediator runs thus: —

"Great Lord of earth! King of all lands,

First-begotten Son of Ea,  
Director of heaven and earth,  
Most merciful among the gods,  
Thou who restorest the dead to life."

....

We see here the reflection of a Being such as the contemporaries of Abraham in the land of the Chaldees must have looked forward to – an image of that diffused and general faith which pervaded the world in the days when the patriarch was called to be the Father of a peculiar people.

In the Zendavesta – begun about the age of Daniel – also are traces of the same Being, with prophecies of his future appearance on earth to restore the human race to peace and goodness.

In one of the Zend books we have a passage strikingly like some of the prophetic parts of Daniel. As Nebuchadnezzar saw the future history of the world under the form of an image, made of four precious metals, so Zoroaster was made to see the same under the image of a tree in which four trunks proceed from a common root. The first was a golden, the second a silver, the third a steel, and the fourth an iron one.

In the same manner as in Daniel, these trees are interpreted as successive monarchies of the earth. The last, the iron one, was to be the dominion of demons and dark powers of evil, and after it was to come the Saviour, or Sosiosch (a *Zend* word), who was to bring in the restitution of all things from the power of evil, and the resurrection of the dead.<sup>4</sup>

The same ideas were expressed in the Sibylline oracles. The story of the Sibyl who offered her books to Tarquin, in the early days of Rome, is known to every child who studies Roman history. From the remains of these writings, still extant, they appear to contain predictions of the world's future, much resembling those of Daniel and Isaiah. They predict the coming of a Great Deliverer of the human race, a millennium of righteousness, a resurrection of the dead, and a Day of Judgment.

About forty years before the birth of Christ, Virgil wrote his beautiful Eclogue of Pollio. The birthplace of Virgil was near the town of Cumæ, where lived the Cumæan Sibyl, and her traditionary history and her writings must have deeply impressed his mind. Possibly he only thought of them as a poet thinks of a fine theme for the display of poetic imagery; and possibly he may have meant to make of this eclogue a complimentary prophecy of some patron among the powerful of his times. But when we remember that it was published only about forty years before the birth of Christ, and that no other historical character corresponding to this prediction ever appeared, it becomes, to say the least, a remarkable coincidence.

Bishop Lowth says that the mystery of this eclogue has never been solved, and intimates that he would scarcely dare to express some of the suppositions which it has inspired.

May not Virgil, like Balaam, have been carried beyond himself in the trance of poetic inspiration, and seen afar the "Star" that should arise out of Israel? He too might have exclaimed: —

"I shall see him, but not now.  
I shall behold him, but not nigh."

The words of Virgil have a fire and fervor such as he seems to have had in no other composition, as he sings: —

"The last age of the Cumæan song is come.  
The great cycle of ages hastens to a new beginning.

---

<sup>4</sup> These passages are quoted and commented on by Hilgenfeld on the *Apocalyptic Literature of the Hebrews*, and Lücke on the *Apocalypse of St. John*.

Now, too, returns the reign of Justice.  
The golden age of Saturn now returns.  
While thou, Pollio, art consul,  
This glory of our age shall make his appearance.  
The great months begin to roll.  
He shall partake of the life of the gods,  
And rule the peaceful world with his father's virtues."

Then follow a profusion of images of peace and plenty that should come to the world in the reign of this hero. All poisonous and hurtful things shall die; all rare and beautiful ones shall grow and abound; there shall be no more toil, no more trouble. Then, with a fine burst of imagery, the poet represents the Fates themselves as singing, to the whirring music of their spindles, a song of welcome: —

"Ye ages, hasten!  
Dear offspring of the gods, set forward on thy way to highest honors;  
The time is at hand.  
See, the world with its round weight bows to thee.  
To thee bow the earth, the regions of the sea and heaven sublime.  
See how all things rejoice at the approach of this age!  
O that my life might last to see and sing thy deeds!"

The close of this eclogue has a mysterious tenderness. The poet predicts that this sublime personage, for whom the world is waiting, should be born amidst the afflictions of his parents and under a cloud of poverty and neglect: —

"Come, little boy, and know thy mother with a smile.  
Come, little boy, on whom thy parents smile not,  
Whom no god honors with a table,  
No goddess with a cradle."

It would seem as if the sensitive soul of Virgil, in the ecstasy of poetic inspiration, acquired a vague clairvoyance of that scene at Bethlehem when there was no room for Joseph and Mary at the inn, and the Heir of all things lay in a manger, outcast and neglected.

Not in Virgil alone, but scattered also here and there through all antiquity, do we find vague, half-prophetic aspirations after the divine Teacher who should interpret God to man, console under the sorrows of life, and charm away the fears of death. In the *Phædo*, when Socrates is comforting his sorrowful disciples in view of his approaching death, and setting before them the probabilities of a continued life beyond the grave, one of them tells him that they believe while they hear him, but when he is gone their doubts will all return, and says, "Where shall we find a charmer then to disperse our fears?" Socrates answers that such a Charmer will yet arise, and bids his disciples seek him in all lands of the earth. Greece, he says, is wide, and there are many foreign lands and even barbarous countries in which they should travel searching for Him, for there is nothing for which they could more reasonably spend time and money.

And in the discourse of Socrates with Alcibiades, as given by Plato, the great philosopher is represented as saying, "We must wait till One shall teach us our duty towards gods and men."

Alcibiades asks, "When, O Socrates, shall that time come, and who will be the Teacher? Most happy should I be to see this man, whoever he is." The Sage replies, "He is One who is concerned for thee. He feels for thee an admirable regard."

When one reads these outreachings for an unknown Saviour in the noblest minds of antiquity, it gives pathos and suggestive power to that emotion which our Lord manifested only a few days before his death, when word was brought him that there were certain *Greeks* desiring to see him. When the message was brought to him he answered with a burst of exultation, "The hour is come that the Son of man should be glorified! Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone, but if it die it bringeth forth much fruit, and I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me!"

He was indeed the "Teacher" who had been "concerned" for Alcibiades, who had cared for Socrates. He was the "Charmer" whom Socrates bade his disciples seek above all things. He was the unknown bringer of good for whom Virgil longed. He was the "Star" of Balaam, the "Benefactor" of the Chaldee astrologers, the "Saviour" predicted by the Persian Zoroaster. He was, it is true, the Shepherd of Israel, but he had a heart for the "other sheep not of this fold," who were scattered through all nations of the earth. He belonged not to any nation, but to the world, and hence aptly and sublimely did the last prophecy proclaim, "The desire of all nations shall come!"

## VII

### THE HIDDEN YEARS OF CHRIST

One great argument for the divine origin of the mission of Jesus is its utter unlikeness to the wisdom and ways of this world. From beginning to end, it ignored and went contrary to all that human schemes for power would have advised.

It was first announced, not to the great or wise, but to the poor and unlettered. And when the holy child, predicted by such splendid prophecies, came and had been adored by the shepherds and magi, had been presented in the temple and blessed by Simeon and Anna – what then? Suddenly he disappears from view. He is gone, no one knows whither – hid in a distant land.

In time the parents return and settle in an obscure village. Nobody knows them, nobody cares for them, and the child grows up as the prophet predicted, "As a tender plant, a root out of dry ground;" the lonely lily of Nazareth.

And then there were thirty years of silence, when nobody thought of him and nobody expected anything from him. There was time for Zacharias and Elisabeth and Simeon and Anna to die; for the shepherds to cease talking of the visions; for the wise ones of the earth to say, "Oh, as to that child, it was nothing at all! He is gone. Nobody knows where he is. You see it has all passed by – a mere superstitious excitement of a few credulous people."

And during these hidden years what was Jesus doing? We have no record. It was said by the Apostle that "in all respects it behooved him to be made like his brethren." Before the full splendor of his divine gifts and powers descended upon him, it was necessary that he should first live an average life, such as the great body of human beings live. For, of Christ as he was during the three years of his public life, it could not be said that he was in all respects in our situation or experiencing our trials. He had unlimited supernatural power; he could heal the sick, raise the dead, hush the stormy waters, summon at his will legions of angels. A being of such power could not be said to understand exactly the feelings of our limitations and weaknesses. But those years of power were only three in the life of our Lord; for thirty years he chose to live the life of an obscure human being.

Jesus prepared for his work among men by passing through the quiet experience of a workingman in the lower orders. The tradition of the church is that Joseph, being much older than Mary, died while Jesus was yet young, and thus the support of his mother devolved upon him. Overbeck has a very touching picture in which he represents Joseph as breathing his last on the bosom of Jesus; it is a sketch full of tenderness and feeling.

What balance of mind, what reticence and self-control, what peace resulting from deep and settled faith, is there in this history, and what a cooling power it must have to the hot and fevered human heart that burns in view of the much that is to be done to bring the world right!

Nothing was ever so strange, so visionary, to all human view so utterly and ridiculously hopeless of success, as the task that Jesus meditated during the thirty years when he was quietly busy over his carpenter's bench in Nazareth. Hundreds of years before, the prophet Daniel saw, in a dream, a stone cut out of the mountain without hands, growing till it filled the earth. Thus the ideal kingdom of Jesus grew in the silence and solitude of his own soul till it became a power and a force before which all other forces of the world have given way. The Christian religion was the greatest and most unprecedented reform ever introduced.

In the present age of the world, the whole movement and uneasiness and convulsion of what is called progress comes from the effort to adjust existing society to the principles laid down by Jesus. The Sermon on the Mount was, and still is, the most disturbing and revolutionary document in the world.

This being the case, what impresses us most in the character of Jesus, as a reformer, is the atmosphere of peacefulness that surrounded him, and in which he seemed to live and move and have his being.

Human beings as reformers are generally agitated, hurried, impatient. Scarcely are the spirits of the prophets subject to the prophets. They are liable to run before the proper time and season, to tear open the bud that ought to unfold; they become nervous, irascible, and lose mental and physical health; and, if the reform on which they have set their heart fails, they are overwhelmed with discouragement and tempted to doubt divine Providence.

Let us now look at Jesus. How terrible was the state of the world at the time when he began to reflect upon it in his unfolding youth! How much was there to be done! What darkness, cruelty, oppression, confusion! Yet he, knowing that that was the work of reorganizing, showed no haste. Thirty years was by Jewish law the appointed time at which a religious teacher should commence his career. Jesus apparently felt no impulse to antedate this period; one incident alone, in his childhood, shows him carried away beyond himself by the divine ardor which filled his soul.

Even then, his answers to his mother showed the consciousness of a divine and wonderful mission such as belonged only to one of the human race, and it is immediately added, "And he went down to Nazareth and was subject to them." Eighteen years now passed away and nothing was known of the enthusiastic spirit. When he appears in the synagogue at Nazareth, he is spoken of simply as "the carpenter." "How knoweth this man letters?" was the cry of his townsmen.

Nothing shows more strongly the veiled and hidden and perfectly quiet life that Jesus had been leading among them. He had been a carpenter, not a teacher. The humble, calm, unobtrusive life of a good mechanic, who does every day's duty in its time and place, is not a thing that calls out any attention in a community. There are many followers of Jesus in this world who are living the same silent, quiet life, who would not be missed in the great world if they were gone, who, being always in place and time, and working without friction or jar, come to be as much disregarded as the daily perfect work of nature.

The life of Jesus must also have been a silent one. Of all the things that he must have been capable of saying we find not one recorded. And the wonder of his townsmen at his capacity of speech shows that there had been no words spoken by him before to accustom them to it.

In our Saviour's public career we are surprised at nothing so much as his calmness. He was never in haste. His words have all the weight of deliberation, and the occasions when he refrains from speech are fully as remarkable as the things he says.

There seems to be about him none of the wearying anxiety as to immediate results, none of the alternations of hope and discouragement that mark our course. He had faith in God, whose great plan he was working, whose message he came to deliver, and whose times and seasons he strictly regarded. So, too, did he regard the mental and spiritual condition of the imperfect ones by whom he was surrounded. "I have many things to say to you, but ye cannot bear them now," he said even to his disciples. When their zeal transcended his, and they longed to get hold of the thunderbolts and call down fire from heaven, his grave and steady rebuke recalled them: "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of."

We see his disciples excited, ardent, – now coming back with triumph to tell how even the devils were subject to them, now forbidding one to cast out devils because he followed not them, now contending who should be greatest; and among them sits the Master, lowly, thoughtful, tranquil, with the little child on his knee, or bending to wash the feet of a disciple, the calmest, sweetest, least assuming of them all.

This should be the model of all Christian reformers. He that believeth shall not make haste is the true motto of Christian reform.

And these great multitudes, to whose hands no special, individual power is given – they are only minute workers in a narrower sphere. Daily toils, small economies, the ordering of the material

cares of life, are all their lot. Before them in their way they can see the footsteps of Jesus. We can conceive that in the lowly path of his life all his works were perfect, that never was a nail driven or a line laid carelessly, and that the toil of that carpenter's bench was as sacred to him as his teachings in the temple, because it was duty.

Sometimes there is a sadness and discontent, a repressed eagerness for some higher sphere, that invades the minds of humble workers. Let them look unto Jesus, and be content. All they have to do is to be "faithful over a few things," and in his own time he will make them "ruler over many things."

## VIII

### THE PRAYER-LIFE OF JESUS

The Bible presents us with the personality of a magnificent Being – the only-begotten Son of God – who, being in the form of God and without robbery equal with God, emptied himself of his glory and took upon him the form of a servant; and, being found in fashion as a man, humbled himself and became obedient to death – even the death of the cross.

This great Being, we are told, entered the race of mortality, divested of those advantages which came from his divine origin, and assuming all those disadvantages of limitation and dependence which belong to human beings. The Apostle says, "It behooved him in all respects to be made like unto his brethren." His lot was obedience – dependence upon the Father – and he gained victories by just the means which are left to us – faith and prayer.

Now, there are many good people whose feeling about prayer is something like this: "I pray because I am commanded to, not because I feel a special need or find a special advantage in it. In my view we are to use our intellect and our will in discovering duties and overcoming temptations, quite sure that God will, of course, aid those who aid themselves." This class of persons look upon all protracted seasons of prayer and periods spent in devotion as so much time taken from the active duties of life. A week devoted to prayer, a convention of Christians meeting to spend eight or ten days in exercises purely devotional, would strike them as something excessive and unnecessary, and tending to fanaticism.

If ever there was a human being who could be supposed able to meet the trials of life and overcome its temptations in his own strength, it must have been Jesus Christ.

But his example stands out among all others, and he is shown to us as peculiarly a man of prayer. The wonderful quietude and reticence of spirit in which he awaited the call of his Father to begin his great work has already been noticed. He waited patiently, living for thirty years the life of a common human being of the lower grades of society, and not making a single movement to display either what may be called his natural gifts, of teaching, etc., or those divine powers which were his birthright. Having taken the place of a servant, as a servant he waited the divine call.

When that call came he consecrated himself to his great work by submitting to the ordinance of baptism. We are told that as he went up from the waters of baptism, praying, the heavens were opened and the Holy Ghost descended upon him, and a voice from heaven said, "Thou art my beloved Son, in thee I am well pleased."

Might we not think that now the man Jesus Christ would feel fully prepared to begin at once the work to which God so visibly called him? But no. The divine Spirit within him led to a still farther delay. More than a month's retreat from all the world's scenes and ways, a period of unbroken solitude, was devoted to meditation and prayer.

If Jesus Christ deemed so much time spent in prayer needful to his work, what shall we say of ourselves? Feeble and earthly, with hearts always prone to go astray, living in a world where everything presses us downward to the lower regions of the senses and passions, how can we afford to neglect that higher communion, those seasons of divine solitude, which were thought necessary by our Master? It was in those many days devoted entirely to communion with God that he gained strength to resist the temptations of Satan, before which we so often fall. Whatever we may think of the mode and manner of that mysterious account of the temptations of Christ, it is evident that they were met and overcome by the spiritual force gained by prayer and the study of God's word.

But it was not merely in this retirement of forty days that our Lord set us the example of the use of seasons of religious seclusion. There is frequent mention made in the Gospels of his retiring for purposes of secret prayer. In the midst of the popularity and success that attended his first beneficent miracles, we are told by St. Mark that, "rising up a great while before day, he went out into a solitary

place and there prayed." His disciples went to look for him, and found him in his retirement, and brought him back with the message, "All men are seeking for thee." In Luke v. 16, it is said: "He withdrew himself into the wilderness and prayed;" and on another occasion (Luke iv. 42), he says: "And when it was day, he departed and went into a desert place." Again, when preparing to take the most important step in his ministry, the choice of his twelve Apostles, we read in Luke vi. 12:

"And it came to pass in those days that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued *all night* in prayer to God; and when it was day, he called unto him his disciples; and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles."

It was when his disciples found him engaged in prayer, and listened for a little while to his devotions, that they addressed to him the petition, "Lord, teach *us* to pray." Might we not all, in view of his example, address to him the same prayer? Surely if there is anything in which Christ's professed disciples need to learn of him it is in prayer.

Not only in example but in teaching did he exhort to prayer. "Watch and pray" were words so often upon his lips that they may seem to be indeed the watchwords of our faith. He bids us retire to our closets and with closed door pray to our Father in secret. He says that men "ought always to pray and not to faint," though the answer be delayed. He reasons from what all men feel of parental longings in granting the requests of their little children, and says, "If ye, being evil, are so ready to hear your children, how much more ready will your Father in heaven be to give good things to them that ask him." Nay, he uses a remarkable boldness in urging us to be importunate in presenting our requests, again and again, in the face of apparent delay and denial. He shows instances where even indifferent or unjust people are overcome by sheer importunity, and intimates how much greater must be the power of importunity – urgent, pressing solicitation – on a Being always predisposed to benevolence.

By all these methods and illustrations our Lord incites us to follow his prayerful example, and to overcome, as he overcame, by prayer. The Christian Church felt so greatly the need of definite seasons devoted to religious retirement that there grew up among them the custom now so extensively observed in Christendom, of devoting forty days in every year to a special retreat from the things of earth, and a special devotion to the work of private and public prayer. Like all customs, even those originating in deep spiritual influences, this is too apt to degenerate into a mere form. Many associate no ideas with "fasting" except a change in articles of food. The true spiritual fasting, which consists in turning our eyes and hearts from the engrossing cares and pleasures of earth and fixing them on things divine, is lost sight of. Our "forty days" are not like our Lord's, given to prayer and the study of God's Word. Nothing could make the period of Lent so much of a reality as to employ it in a systematic effort to fix the mind on Jesus. The history in the Gospels is so well worn that it often slips through the head without affecting the heart.

But if, retiring into solitude for a portion of each day, we should select some one scene or trait or incident in the life of Jesus, and with all the helps we can get seek to understand it fully, tracing it in the other evangelists, comparing it with other passages of Scripture, etc., we should find ourselves insensibly interested, and might hope that in this effort of our souls to understand him, Jesus himself would draw near, as he did of old to the disciples on the way to Emmaus.

This looking unto Jesus and thinking about him is a better way to meet and overcome sin than any physical austerities or spiritual self-reproaches. It is by looking at him, the Apostle says, "as in a glass," that we are "changed into the same image, as from glory to glory."

## IX

# THE TEMPTATIONS OF JESUS

Intimately connected with the forty days of solitude and fasting is the mysterious story of the Temptation.

We are told in the Epistle to the Hebrews that our Lord was exposed to a peculiar severity of trial in order that he might understand the sufferings and wants of us feeble human beings. "For in that he himself hath suffered, being tempted, he is able to succor those who are tempted." We are to understand, then, that however divine was our Lord's nature in his preëxistent state, he chose to assume our weakness and our limitations, and to meet and overcome the temptations of Satan by just such means as are left to us – by faith and prayer and the study of God's Word.

There are many theories respecting this remarkable history of the temptation. Some suppose the Evil Spirit to have assumed a visible form, and to have been appreciably present. But if we accept the statement we have quoted from the Epistle to the Hebrews, that our Lord was tempted in all respects as we are, it must have been an invisible and spiritual presence with which he contended. The temptations must have presented themselves to him, as to us, by thoughts injected into his mind.

It seems probable that, of many forms of temptation which he passed through, the three of which we are told are selected as specimens, and if we notice we shall see that they represent certain great radical sources of trial to the whole human race.

First comes the temptation from the cravings of animal appetite. Perhaps hunger – the want of food and the weakness and faintness resulting from it – brings more temptation to sin than any other one cause. To supply animal cravings men are driven to theft and murder, and women to prostitution. The more fortunate of us, who are brought up in competence and shielded from want, cannot know the fierceness of this temptation – its driving, maddening power. But he who came to estimate our trials, and to help the race of man in their temptations, chose to know what the full force of the pangs of hunger were, and to know it in the conscious possession of miraculous power which could at any moment have supplied them. To have used this power for the supply of his wants would have been at once to abandon that very condition of trial and dependence which he came to share with us. It was a sacred trust, not given for himself but for the world. It was the very work he undertook, to bear the trials which his brethren bore as they were called to bear them, with only such helps as it might please the Father to give him in his own time and way.

So when the invisible tempter suggested that he might at once relieve this pain and gratify this craving, he answered simply that there was a higher life than the animal, and that man could be upborne by faith in God even under the pressure of utmost want. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." How many poor, suffering followers of Christ, called to forsake the means of livelihood for conscience' sake, have been obliged to live as Christ did on the simple promise of God, and to wait. Such sufferers may feel that they are not called to this trial by one ignorant of its nature or unsympathetic with their weakness. And the same consolation applies to all who struggle with the lower wants of our nature in any form. Christ's pity and sympathy are for them.

All who struggle with animal desires in any form, which duty forbids them to gratify, may remember that God has given them an Almighty Saviour, who, having suffered, is able to succor those that are tempted.

The second trial was no less universal. It was the temptation to use his sacred and solemn gifts from God for purposes of personal ostentation and display. "Why not," suggests the tempter, "descend from the pinnacle of the temple upborne by angels? How striking a manifestation of the power of the Son of God!" To this came the grave answer, "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God," – by needlessly incurring a danger which would make miraculous deliverance necessary.

Is no one in our day put to this test? Is not the young minister at God's altar, to whom is given eloquence and power over the souls of men, in danger of this temptation to theatric exhibitions – ostentatious display of self – this seeking for what is dramatic and striking, rather than what is for God's service and glory? Whoever is intrusted with power of any kind or in any degree is tempted to use it selfishly rather than divinely. To all such the Lord's temptation and resistance of it gives assurance of help if help be sought.

But finally came the last, the most insidious temptation, and its substance seemed to be this: "Why not use these miraculous gifts to make a worldly party? Why not flatter the national vanity of the Jews, excite their martial spirit, lead them to a course of successful revolt against their masters, and then of brilliant conquest, and seize upon all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them? To be sure, this will require making concession here and there to the evil passions of men, but when the supreme power is once gained all shall go right. Why this long, slow path of patience and self-denial? Why this conflict with the world? Why the cross and the grave? Why not the direct road of power, using the worldly forces first, and afterwards the spiritual?" This seems to be a free version of all that is included in the proposition: "All this power will I give thee, and the glory of it; for that is delivered unto me and to whomsoever I will I give it. If, therefore, thou wilt worship me all shall be thine."

The indignant answer of Jesus shows with what living energy he repelled every thought of the least concession to evil, the least advantage to be gained by following or allowing the corrupt courses of this world. He would not flatter the rich and influential. He would not conceal offensive truth. He would seek the society of the poor and despised. He taught love of enemies in the face of a nation hating their enemies and longing for revenge. He taught forgiveness and prayer, while they were longing for battle and conquest. He blessed the meek, the sorrowful, the merciful, the persecuted for righteousness, instead of the powerful and successful. If he had been willing to have been such a king as the Scribes and Pharisees wanted they would have adored him and fought for him. But because his kingdom was not of this world they cried: "Not this man, but Barabbas!" It is said that after this temptation the Devil departed from him "for a season." But all through his life, in one form or another, that temptation must have been suggested to him.

When he told his Apostles that he was going up to Jerusalem to suffer and to die, Peter, it is said, rebuked him with earnestness: "That be far from thee, Lord; such things shall not happen to thee."

Jesus instantly replies, not to Peter, but to the Invisible Enemy who through Peter's affection and ambition is urging the worldly and self-seeking course upon him: "Get thee behind me, Satan, thou art an offence unto me. Thou savorest not the things that be of God but of man."

We are told that the temptation of Christ was so real that he suffered, being tempted. He knew that he must disappoint the expectations of all his friends who had set their hearts on the temporal kingdom, that he was leading them on step by step to a season of unutterable darkness and sorrow. The cross was bitter to him, in prospect as in reality, but never for a moment did he allow himself to swerve from it. As the time drew near, he said, "Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour? But, for this cause came I unto this hour; – Father, glorify thy name!"

Is not this lifelong temptation which Christ overcame one that meets us all every day and hour? To live an unworldly life; never to seek place or power or wealth by making the least sacrifice of conscience or principle; is it easy? is it common? Yet he who chose rather to die on the cross than to yield in the slightest degree his high spiritual mission can feel for our temptations and succor us even here.

The Apostle speaks of life as a *race* set before us, which we are to win by laying aside every impediment and looking steadfastly unto Jesus, who, "for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross." Our victories over self are to be gained not so much by self-reproaches and self-conflicts as by the enthusiasm of looking away from ourselves to Him who has overcome for us. Our Christ is not dead, but alive forevermore! A living presence, ever near to the soul that seeks salvation from sin. And to the struggling and the tempted he still says, "Look unto ME, and be ye saved."

## X OUR LORD'S BIBLE

The life of Jesus, regarded from a mere human point of view, presents an astonishing problem. An obscure man in an obscure province has revolutionized the world. Every letter and public document of the most cultured nations dates from his birth, as a new era. How was this man educated? We find he had no access to the Greek and Roman literature. Jesus was emphatically a man of one book. That book was the Hebrew Scriptures, which we call the Old Testament. The Old Testament was his Bible, and this single consideration must invest it with undying interest for us.

We read the Bible which our parents read. We see, perhaps, pencil-marks here and there, which show what they loved and what helped and comforted them in the days of their life-struggle, and the Bible is dearer to us on that account. Then, going backward along the bright pathway of the sainted and blessed who lived in former ages, the Bible becomes diviner to us for their sake. The Bible of the Martyrs, the Bible of the Waldenses, the Bible of Luther and Calvin, of our Pilgrim Fathers, has a double value.

I have in my possession a very ancient black-letter edition of the Bible printed in 1522, more than three hundred years ago. In this edition many of the Psalms have been read and re-read, till the paper is almost worn away. Some human heart, some suffering soul, has taken deep comfort here. If to have been the favorite, intimate friend of the greatest number of hearts be an ambition worthy of a poet, David has gained a loftier place than any poet who ever wrote. He has lived next to the heart of men, and women, and children, of all ages, in all climes, in all times and seasons, all over the earth. They have rejoiced and wept, prayed and struggled, lived and died, with David's words in their mouths. His heart has become the universal Christian heart, and will ever be, till earth's sorrows, and earth itself, are a vanished dream.

It is too much the fashion of this day to speak slightly of the Old Testament. Apart from its grandeur, its purity, its tenderness and majesty, the Old Testament has this peculiar interest to the Christian, – it was the Bible of the Lord Jesus Christ.

As a man, Jesus had a human life to live, a human experience to undergo. For thirty silent years he was known among men only as a carpenter in Nazareth, and the Scriptures of the Old Testament were his daily companions. When he emerges into public life, we find him thoroughly versed in the Scriptures. Allusions to them are constant, through all his discourses; he continually refers to them as writings that reflect his own image. "Search the Scriptures," he says, "for they are they that testify of me."

The Psalms of David were to Jesus all and more than they can be to any other son of man.

In certain of them he saw himself and his future life, his trials, conflicts, sufferings, resurrection, and final triumph foreshadowed. He quoted them to confound his enemies. When they sought to puzzle him with perplexing questions he met them with others equally difficult, drawn from the Scriptures. He asks them: —

"What think ye of the Messiah? whose son is he? They say unto him, the Son of David. He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand till I make thine enemies thy footstool? If David then call him Lord, how is he his son?"

So, when they ask the question, "Which is the greatest commandment of all?" he answers by placing together two passages in the Old Testament, the one commanding supreme love to God and the other impartial love to man's neighbor. The greatest commandment of all nowhere stands in the Old Testament exactly as Jesus quotes it, the first part being found in Deuteronomy vi. 5, and the

second in Leviticus xix. 18. This is a specimen of the exhaustive manner in which he studied and used the Scriptures.

Our Saviour quotes often also from the prophets. In his first public appearance in his native village he goes into the synagogue and reads from Isaiah. When they question and disbelieve, he answers them by pointed allusions to the stories of Naaman the Syrian and the widow of Sarepta. When the Sadducees raise the question of a future life, he replies by quoting from the Pentateuch that God calls himself the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and God is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living, for all are alive to him. He cites the history of Jonah as a symbol of his own death and resurrection; and at the last moment of his trial before the High Priest, when adjured to say whether he be the Christ or not, he replies in words that recall the sublime predictions in the Book of Daniel of the coming of Messiah to judgment. The prophet says: —

"I saw in my vision, and, behold, One like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days; and there was given unto him dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all people and nations and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, that shall not pass away or be destroyed."

When the High Priest of the Jews said to Jesus, "I adjure thee by the living God that thou tell us whether thou be Messiah or not," he answered, "I am; and hereafter ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power and coming in the clouds of heaven."

So much was the character of our Lord's teaching colored and impregnated by the writings of the Old Testament that it is impossible fully to comprehend Jesus without an intimate knowledge of them. To study the life of Christ without the Hebrew Scriptures is to study a flower without studying the plant from which it sprung, the root and leaves which nourished it. He continually spoke of himself as a Being destined to fulfill what had gone before. "Think not," he said, "that I am come to destroy the Law and the Prophets. I am not come to destroy but to fulfill." He frequently spoke of himself as of the order and race of Jewish prophets; like them he performed symbolic acts which were visible prophecies, as when he knew his nation had finally rejected him he signified their doom by the awful sign of the blasted fig-tree. Through all the last days of Jesus, as his death approaches, we find continual references to the Old Testament prophecies, and quotations from them.

And after his resurrection, when he appears to his disciples, he "opens to them the Scriptures;" that talk on the way to Emmaus was an explanation of the prophecies, by our Lord himself. Would that it had been recorded! Would not our hearts too have "burned within us!"

Now, a book that was in life and in death so dear to our Lord, a book which he interpreted as from first to last a preparation for and prophecy of himself, cannot but be full of interest to us Christians. When we read the Old Testament Scriptures we go along a track that we know Jesus and his mother must often have trod together. The great resemblance in style between the Song of Mary and the Psalms of David is one of the few indications given in Holy Writ of the veiled and holy mystery of his mother's life. She was a poetess, a prophetess, one whose mind was capable of the highest ecstasy of inspiration. Let us read the Psalms again, with the thought in our mind that they were the comforters, the counselors of Jesus and Mary. What was so much to them cannot be indifferent to us.

Nor did the disciples and Apostles in the glow of the unfolding dispensation cease to reverence and value those writings so closely studied by their Lord. They did not speak of them as a worn-out thing, that had "had its day," but they alluded to them with the affectionate veneration due to divine oracles. "The prophecy came not of old times by the will of man, but holy men of old spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." St. Paul congratulates Timothy that "from a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation," and adds: "all Scripture is

given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

Even while the New Testament was being formed, its writers gave this complete testimony to the Old, as being able to make men "wise unto salvation," and to complete a man's spiritual education. This book, then, so dear to Christ and his Apostles, is something that should be dear to all Christians. Its study will enrich the soul. It is wonderful, mysterious, unique – there is no sacred book like it in the world; and in reading it we come nearer to Him who was foretold by it, and who when he came upon the earth found in it nourishment for his soul, instruction and spiritual refreshment by the wayside, comfort even in the extreme agonies of a dreadful death. However dear to us may be the story of his life in the Gospels and his teachings through his Apostles and their Epistles, let us in following his steps forget not "the Scriptures" which he bade us search, but diligently read and love the Bible of our Lord.

## XI CHRIST'S FIRST SERMON

The first public sermon of the long-desired Messiah – his first declaration of his mission and message to the world – what was it?

It was delivered in his own city of Nazareth, where he had been brought up; it was on the Sabbath day; it was in the synagogue where he had always worshiped; and it was in manner and form exactly in accordance with the customs of his national religion.

It had always been customary among the Jews to call upon any member of the synagogue to read a passage from the book of the prophets; and the young man Jesus, concerning whom certain rumors had vaguely gone forth, was on the day in question called to take his part in the service. It was a holy and solemn moment, when the long silence of years was to be broken. Jesus was surrounded by faces familiar from infancy. His mother, his brothers, his sisters, were all there; every eye was fixed upon him. The historian says: —

"And there was delivered unto him the book (or roll) of the prophet Isaiah, and when he had unrolled the book he found the place where it is written (Isaiah lxi.): —

The spirit of the Lord is upon me.  
He hath anointed me to preach good tidings to the poor;  
He hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted;  
To preach deliverance to the captives;  
The recovering of sight to the blind;  
To set at liberty them that are bruised;  
To preach the acceptable year of the Lord."

We may imagine the sweetness, the tenderness, the enthusiasm with which this beautiful announcement of his mission was uttered; and when, closing the book, he looked round on the faces of his townsmen and acquaintances, and said, "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears," – it was an appeal of Heavenly love yearning to heal and to save those nearest and longest known.

It would seem that the sweet voice, the graceful manner, at first charmed the rough audience; there was a thrilling, vibrating power, that struck upon every heart. But those hearts were cold and hard. A Saviour from sin, a Comforter of sorrow, was not what they were looking for in their Messiah. They felt themselves good enough spiritually, in their observance of the forms of their law and ritual; they were stupidly content with themselves and wanted no comforter. What they did want was a brilliant military leader. They wanted a miracle-working, supernatural Lord and Commander that should revenge their national wrongs, conquer the Romans, and set the Jewish people at the head of the world. Having heard of the miracles of Christ in Cana and Capernaum, they had thought that perhaps he might prove this Leader, and if so, what a glory for Nazareth! But they were in a critical, exacting mood; they were in their hearts calling for some brilliant and striking performance that should illuminate and draw attention to their town. Although the congregation were at first impressed and charmed with the gracious words and manner of the speaker, the hard, vulgar spirit of envy and carping criticism soon overshadowed their faces.

"Who is this Jesus – is he not the carpenter? What sign does he show? Let him work some miracles forthwith, and we will see if we will believe."

It was this disposition which our Lord felt in the atmosphere around him; the language of souls uttered itself to him unspoken. He answered as he so often did to the feeling he saw in the hearts rather than the words of those around him. He said, "Ye will say to me, Physician, heal thyself. Do

here in thy native place the marvels we have heard of in Capernaum. I tell you a truth; no prophet is accepted in his own country. There were many widows in Israel in the time of the prophet Elijah, but he was sent only to a widow of Sarepta, a city of Sidon. There were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha, yet none of them was healed but Naaman the Syrian." It would seem as if our Lord was preparing to show them that he had a mission of love and mercy that could not be bounded by one village, or even by the chosen race of Israel, but was for the world.

But the moment he spoke of favors and blessings given to the Gentiles the fierce national spirit flamed up; the speech was cut short by a tumultuous uprising of the whole synagogue. They laid violent hands on Jesus and hurried him to the brow of the precipice on which their city was built, to cast him down headlong. But before the murder was consummated the calm majesty of Jesus had awed his persecutors. Their slackened hands dropped; they looked one on another irresolute: and he, passing silently through the midst of them, went his way. He had offered himself to them as their Saviour from sin and from sorrow in the very fullness of his heart. Heavenly tenderness and sweetness had stretched out its arms to embrace them, and been repulsed by sneering coldness and hard, worldly unbelief.

Nazareth did not want Him; and he left it. It was the first of those many rejections which He at last summed up when he said, "How often would I have gathered thy children, and ye would not."

But, though he thus came to his own and his own received him not, yet the lovely and gracious proclamation which he made then and there still stands unfading and beautiful as a rainbow of hope over this dark earth. The one Being sent into the world to represent the Invisible Father, and to show us the hidden heart and purposes of God in this mysterious life of ours, there declared that his mission was one of pity, of help, of consolation; that the poor, the bruised, the desolate, the prisoner, might forever find a Friend in him.

There are times when the miseries and sorrows of the suffering race of man, the groaning and travailing of this mysterious life of ours, oppress us, and our faith in God's love grows faint.

Then let us turn our thoughts to this divine Personality, Jesus, the anointed Son of God, and hear him saying now, as he said at Nazareth: —

"The spirit of the Lord is upon ME.  
He hath sent me to preach good tidings to the poor;  
He hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted,  
To preach deliverance to the captives,  
The recovering of sight to the blind,  
To set at liberty them that are bruised!"

It is said of him in the prophets: "He shall not fail nor be discouraged till he have set judgment in the earth. The isles shall wait for his law. Our Redeemer is mighty; the Lord of Hosts is his name — our Saviour, the Holy One of Israel!"

## XII THE FRIENDSHIPS OF JESUS

In turning our thoughts toward various scenes of our Lord's life, we are peculiarly affected with the human warmth and tenderness of his personal friendships. The little association of his own peculiar friends makes a picture that we need to study to understand him.

St. John touchingly says: "Now when the time was come that Jesus should depart out of the world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world he loved them unto the end." When we think that all that we know of our Lord comes through these friends of his – the witnesses and recorders of his life and death – we shall feel more than ever what he has made them to us. Without them we should have had no Jesus.

Our Lord, with all that he is to us, is represented to us through the loving hearts and affectionate records of these his chosen ones. It is amazing to think of, that our Lord never left to his church one line written by his own hand, and that all his words come to us transfused through the memories of his friends. How much to us, then, were these friendships of Jesus – how dear to us, for all eternity, these friends!

We are told that immediately after the resurrection there was an associated church of one hundred and twenty, who are characterized by Peter as "men that have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us."

The account of how these friends were gathered to him becomes deeply interesting. St. John relates how, one day, John the Baptist saw Jesus walking by the Jordan in silent contemplation, and pointed him out to his disciples: "Behold the Lamb of God." And the two disciples heard him speak and followed Jesus. Then Jesus turned and said, "What seek ye?" They said, "Master, where dwellest thou?" He answered, "Come and see." They came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with him that day. We learn from this that some of the disciples were those whose spiritual nature had been awakened by John the Baptist, and who, under his teaching, were devoting themselves to a religious life. We see the power of personal attraction possessed by our Lord, which drew these simple, honest natures to himself. One of these men was Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter, and he immediately carried the glad tidings to his brother, "We have found the Messiah;" and he brought him to Jesus. Thus, by a sort of divine attraction, one brother and friend bringing another, the little band increased. Some were more distinctly called by the Master. Matthew, the tax-gatherer, sitting in his place of business, heard the words, "Follow me," and immediately rose up, and left all and followed him. James and John forsook their nets, in the midst of their day's labor, to follow him. In time, a little band of twelve left all worldly callings and home ties, to form a traveling mission family of which Jesus was the head and father. Others, both men and women, at times traveled with them and assisted their labors; but these twelve were the central figures.

## **Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.**

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.