

A SCENE IN JERUSALEM.

It is now nearly noon, the busiest and most bustling hour of the day; yet the streets of the Holy City seem deserted and silent as the grave. The artisan has left his bench, the merchant his merchandise; the throngs of returned wanderers which this great national festival has brought up from every land of the earth, and which have been for the last week carrying life and motion through every street, seem suddenly to have disappeared. Here and there solitary footfalls, like the last pattering rain drops after a shower, awaken the echoes of the streets; and here and there some lonely woman looks from the housetop with anxious and agitated face, as if she would discern something in the far distance.

Alone, or almost alone, the few remaining priests move like white-winged, solitary birds over the gorgeous pavements of the temple, and as they mechanically conduct the ministrations of the day, cast significant glances on each other, and pause here and there to converse in anxious whispers.

Ah there is one voice which they have often heard beneath those arches--a voice which ever bore in it a mysterious and thrilling charm--which they know will be hushed to-day. Chief priest, scribe, and doctor have all gone out in the death procession after him; and these few remaining ones, far from the excitement of the crowd, and busied in

calm and sacred duties, find voices of anxious questioning rising from the depths of their own souls, "What if this indeed were the Christ?"

But pass we on out of the city, and what a surging tide of life and motion meets the eye, as if all nations under heaven had dashed their waves of population on this Judean shore! A noisy, wrathful, tempestuous mob, billow on billow, waver and rally round some central object, which it conceals from view. Parthians, Medes, Elamites, dwellers in Mesopotamia and Egypt, strangers of Rome, Cretes and Arabians, Jew and Proselyte, convoked from the ends of the earth, throng in agitated concourse one on another; one theme in every face, on every tongue, one name in every variety of accent and dialect passing from lip to lip: "Jesus of Nazareth!"

Look on that man--the centre and cause of all this outburst! He stands there alone. The cross is ready. It lies beneath his feet. The rough hand of a brutal soldier has seized his robe to tear it from him. Another with stalwart arm is boring the holes, gazing upward the while with a face of stupid unconcern. There on the ground lie the hammer and the nails: the hour, the moment of doom is come! Look on this man, as upward, with deep, sorrowing eyes, he gazes towards heaven. Hears he the roar of the mob? Feels he the rough hand on his garment? Nay, he sees not, feels not: from all the rage and tumult of the hour he is rapt away. A sorrow deeper, more absorbing, more unearthly seems to possess him, as upward with long gaze he looks to that heaven never before closed to his prayer, to that God never before to him invisible. That

mournful, heaven-searching glance, in its lonely anguish, says but one thing: "Lo, I come to do thy will, O God."

Through a life of sorrow the realized love of his Father has shone like a precious and beautiful talisman in his bosom; but now, when desolation and anguish have come upon him as a whirlwind, this last star has gone out in the darkness, and Jesus, deserted by man and God, stands there alone.

Alone? No; for undaunted by the cruel mob, fearless in the strength of mortal anguish, helpless, yet undismayed, stands the one blessed among women, the royal daughter of a noble line, the priestess to whose care was intrusted this spotless sacrifice. She and her son, last of a race of kings, stand there despised, rejected, and disavowed by their nation, to accomplish dread words of prophecy, which have swept down for far ages to this hour.

Strange it is, in this dark scene, to see the likeness between mother and son, deepening in every line of those faces, as they stand thus thrown out by the dark background of rage and hate, which like a storm cloud lowers around. The same rapt, absorbed, calm intensity of anguish in both mother and son, save only that while he gazes upward towards God, she, with like fervor, gazes on him. What to her is the deriding mob, the coarse taunt, the brutal abuse? Of it all she hears, she feels nothing. She sinks not, faints not, weeps not; her whole being concentrates in the will to suffer by and with him to the last. Other

hearts there are that beat for him; others that press into the doomed circle, and own him amid the scorn of thousands. There may you see the clasped hands and upraised eyes of a Magdalen, the pale and steady resolve of John, the weeping company of women who bewailed and lamented him; but none dare press so near, or seem so identical with him in his sufferings, as this mother.

And as we gaze on these two in human form, surrounded by other human forms, how strange the contrast! How is it possible that human features and human lineaments essentially alike, can be wrought into such heaven-wide contrast? MAN is he who stands there, lofty and spotless, in bleeding patience! Men also are those brutal soldiers, alike stupidly ready, at the word of command, to drive the nail through quivering flesh or insensate wood. Men are those scowling priests and infuriate Pharisees. Men, also, the shifting figures of the careless rabble, who shout and curse without knowing why. No visible glory shines round that head; yet how, spite of every defilement cast upon him by the vulgar rabble, seems that form to be glorified! What light is that in those eyes! What mournful beauty in that face! What solemn, mysterious sacredness investing the whole form, constraining from us the exclamation, "Surely this is the Son of God." Man's voice is breathing vulgar taunt and jeer: "He saved others; himself he cannot save." "He trusted in God; let him deliver him if he will have him." And man's, also, clear, sweet, unearthly, pierces that stormy mob, saying, "Father, forgive them; they know not what they do."

But we draw the veil in reverence. It is not ours to picture what the sun refused to shine upon, and earth shook to behold.

Little thought those weeping women, that stricken disciple, that heart-broken mother, how on some future day that cross--emblem to them of deepest infamy--should blaze in the eye of all nations, symbol of triumph and hope, glittering on gorgeous fanes, embroidered on regal banners, associated with all that is revered and powerful on earth. The Roman ensign that waved on that mournful day, symbol of highest earthly power, is a thing mouldered and forgotten; and over all the high places of old Rome, herself stands that mystical cross, no longer speaking of earthly anguish and despair, but of heavenly glory, honor, and immortality.

Theologians have endlessly disputed and philosophized on this great fact of atonement. The Bible tells only that this tragic event was the essential point without which our salvation could never have been secured. But where lay the necessity they do not say. What was that dread strait that either the divine One must thus suffer, or man be lost, who knoweth?

To this question answer a thousand voices, with each a different solution, urged with equal confidence--each solution to its framer as certain and sacred as the dread fact it explains--yet every one, perhaps, unsatisfactory to the deep-questioning soul. The Bible, as it always does, gives on this point not definitions or distinct outlines,

but images--images which lose all their glory and beauty if seized by the harsh hands of metaphysical analysis, but inexpressibly affecting to the unlettered human heart, which softens in gazing on their mournful and mysterious beauty. Christ is called our sacrifice, our passover, our atoning high priest; and he himself, while holding in his hands the emblem cup, says, "It is my blood, shed for many, for the remission of sins." Let us reason on it as we will, this story of the cross, presented without explanation in the simple metaphor of the Bible, has produced an effect on human nature wholly unaccountable. In every age and clime, with every variety of habit, thought, and feeling, from the cannibals of New Zealand and Madagascar to the most enlightened and scientific minds in Christendom, one feeling, essentially homogeneous in its character and results, has arisen in view of this cross. There is something in it that strikes one of the great nerves of simple, unsophisticated humanity, and meets its wants as nothing else will. Ages ago, Paul declared to philosophizing Greek and scornful Roman that he was not ashamed of this gospel, and alleged for his reason this very adaptedness to humanity. A priori, many would have said that Paul should have told of Christ living, Christ preaching, Christ working miracles, not omitting also the pathetic history of how he sealed all with his blood; but Paul declared that he determined to know nothing else but Christ crucified. He said it was a stumbling block to the Jew, an absurdity to the Greek; yet he was none the less positive in his course. True, there was many then, as now, who looked on with the most philosophic and cultivated indifference. The courtly Festus, as he settled his purple tunic, declared he could make nothing of the matter,

only a dispute about one Jesus, who was dead, and whom Paul affirmed to be alive; and perchance some Athenian, as he reclined on his ivory couch at dinner, after the sermon on Mars Hill, may have disposed of the matter very summarily, and passed on to criticisms on Samian wine and marble vases. Yet in spite of their disbelief, this story of Christ has outlived them, their age and nation, and is to this hour as fresh in human hearts as if it were just published. This "one Jesus which was dead, and whom Paul affirmed to be alive," is nominally, at least, the object of religious homage in all the more cultivated portions of the globe; and to hearts scattered through all regions of the earth this same Jesus is now a sacred and living name, dearer than all household sounds, all ties of blood, all sweetest and nearest affections of humanity. "I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die for the name of the Lord Jesus," are words that have found an echo in the bosoms of thousands in every age since then; that would, if need were, find no less echo in thousands now. Considering Christ as a man, and his death as a mere pathetic story,--considering him as one of the great martyrs for truth, who sealed it with his blood,--this result is wholly unaccountable. Other martyrs have died, bravely and tenderly, in their last hours "bearing witness of the godlike" that is in man; but who so remembers them? Who so loves them? To whom is any one of them a living presence, a life, an all? Yet so thousands look on Jesus at this hour.

Nay, it is because this story strikes home to every human bosom as an individual concern. A thrilling voice speaks from this scene of anguish to every human bosom: This is thy Savior. Thy sin hath done this. It

is the appropriative words, thine and mine, which make this history different from any other history. This was for me, is the thought which has pierced the apathy of the Greenlander, and kindled the stolid clay of the Hottentot; and no human bosom has ever been found so low, so lost, so guilty, so despairing, that this truth, once received, has not had power to redeem, regenerate, and disenthral. Christ so presented becomes to every human being a friend nearer than the mother who bore him; and the more degraded, the more hopeless and polluted, is the nature, the stronger comes on the living reaction, if this belief is really and vividly enkindled with it. But take away this appropriative, individual element, and this legend of Jesus's death has no more power than any other. He is to us no more than Washington or Socrates, or Howard. And where is there not a touchstone to try every theory of atonement? Whatever makes a man feel that he is only a spectator, an uninterested judge in this matter, is surely astray from the idea of the Bible. Whatever makes him feel that his sins have done this deed, that he is bound, soul and body, to this Deliverer, though it may be in many points philosophically erroneous, cannot go far astray.

If we could tell the number of the stars, and call them forth by name, then, perhaps, might we solve all the mystic symbols by which the Bible has shadowed forth the far-lying necessities and reachings-forth of this event "among principalities and powers," and in "ages to come." But he who knows nothing of all this, who shall so present the atonement as to bind and affianc human souls indissolubly to their Redeemer, does all that could be done by the highest and most perfect knowledge.

The great object is accomplished, when the soul, rapt, inspired, feels
the deep resolve,--

"Remember Thee!

Yea, from the table of my memory

I'll wipe away all trivial, fond records,

All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past

That youth and observation copied there,

And thy commandment all alone shall live

Within the book and volume of my brain,

Unmixed with baser matter."