

The Man Bearing a Pitcher of Water.

LUKE XXII. 10.

BY REV. HUGH MACMILLAN, D.D., LL.D., F.R.S.E.

WHEN the disciples at Bethany asked our Lord where He wished that they should keep the Passover, we are told that He sent Peter and John to Jerusalem, and told them that as they entered the city they should see a man bearing a pitcher of water. They were to follow him to the house where he lived, and the goodman of the house would show them the upper room ready furnished, where they were to prepare the supper. I have chosen this homely incident to show how the Passover was observed in the midst of ordinary life, and its familiar surroundings. We have no record of our Lord's previous celebration of this sacred feast. We know, indeed, that He went up to Jerusalem to the Passover several times during the course of His life, but there is no account of His having actually partaken of it. The only description we have is that which is given so fully at the close of the Gospels. That Passover was not only the last that Jesus partook of with His disciples; it was absolutely the last Passover of the Jewish Dispensation. It was abolished by His own sacrifice, and changed into the memorial feast of the Lord's Supper. It was, therefore, a specially solemn and significant occasion. Christ Himself says of it to His disciples, "With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer." And yet, peculiarly holy and full of world-wide, time-long meaning as it was, it took place amid the common details of family life. It was not held in a court of the temple, but in the upper room of an unknown citizen. It was not ushered in by pomp and ceremony and portent, but by a humble servant carrying a pitcher of water for household purposes. The imagination loves to dwell upon these homely circumstances. They are so entirely in harmony with the character of the meek and lowly Jesus, and with the nature of His work, who did not cry, nor lift up, nor cause His voice to be heard in the streets.

The lesson which this simple incident teaches us is that our Passover ought not to be dissociated from our ordinary life, and made an unearthly, unnatural experience. We are apt to stand too much in awe of the Holy Supper, as something tabooed which has no connection with our usual

circumstances, a bit of heaven islanded amid the sea of common life. We have inherited the old traditions and instincts of pre-Reformation times, when the cup was withheld from the laity, and the ordinance was invested with a supernatural halo which guarded it from intrusion as the wall of fire guarded Sinai from the approach of the Israelites. The custom of setting apart special days of fasting and prayer in order to prepare for the rite, and of fencing the tables by a rigid code of formal exclusions, which, no doubt, originated in a right feeling and has served a good purpose, has left an impression of undue solemnity upon the ordinance, and elevated it to a position which it was never meant to hold. This feeling in some cases has degenerated into superstition; and there are many who have such an overmastering estimate of its awfulness that they are afraid to partake of it lest they should desecrate it by their unworthiness. There are aged Christians who, owing to this mistaken feeling, have never once, during the course of a long life of faithful Christian profession, sat down at the Lord's Table; and thus they have lived in practical disobedience to the express commandment of our Lord, which is binding upon every human being who knows what Jesus has done and suffered for him—"Do this in remembrance of me." In this way, what was divinely meant to be a help to faith has been perverted by the traditions of men into a stumbling-block and a hindrance.

Now, surely the thought of the feast being instituted in a common room, belonging to a person whose very name we do not know, which room was pointed out by a servant engaged in the ordinary work of the house, carrying a pitcher of water, ought to reassure our minds, and prove to us that the feast after all is but a household service, a family meal, linked most closely with all the familiar things of our ordinary life. The bread that we eat at the Lord's Table is human nature's daily food. The bread and the wine are put upon the Communion Table to show that the common things of life are consecrated by being used aright in the service of God. The communion service is a part of the common worship of the sanctuary. The only difference is that the truths which are

conveyed in words in the ordinary preaching of the gospel appealing to the ear only, in the Lord's Supper are conveyed in symbols appealing to the eye. The Lord's Supper is just the child's picture book, to make the lessons of the Cross plainer and more easy of comprehension to all of us, who are in reality only spiritual children, with ignorant minds and feeble faith. We are led to-day to the Lord's Table in much the same way as the disciples were led to the first Lord's Supper, as it were by the man carrying the pitcher of water. We come by the common road, amid the old circumstances, to the old place; and the Communion Table is only the upper chamber of the familiar Church.

This is no high mystic service; no exclusive channel of grace. There is no sacramentarianism about it. The same qualifications are required for it, and the same faculties exercised in it that are necessary in the ordinary profitable hearing of the gospel, and the ordinary acceptable worship of the sanctuary. Ideas of special fitness have been gratuitously associated with the ordinance from a misconception and misapplication of the Apostle Paul's words. The unworthy partaking of the Lord's Supper on the part of the Corinthian converts, of which he complained, was the confounding of the sacred rite with the common meal, of which they partook together for the mere satisfying of their bodily wants; passing from the one to the other without recognising any distinction between them. Such persons in what they did could not discern the Lord's body; their act had no spiritual significance to them. Between this real unworthiness and the feeling of personal unworthiness which the humble and contrite communicant entertains, there is nothing in common. The unworthiness of the Corinthian converts arose from too little reverence, and utterly disqualified them for the right partaking of the sacred ordinance. The feeling of unworthiness which the true communicant in our churches experiences arises, on the contrary, from much reverence, from a deep sense of personal sin and of Christ's holiness, and is therefore altogether becoming to the occasion; so that the more unworthy in that sense the communicant feels, the more worthy he truly is. His unworthiness consists in his sense of his own nothingness, and of Christ's all-sufficiency.

The terms, too, in which the abuse of the ordinance is apparently described in Scripture seem

still further to cast a lurid, forbidding light around it. "He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself." It is satisfactory to find that the word *damnation* is a mistranslation for "judgment," and that men now understand better that damnation, eternal punishment, does not follow from the abuse of an ordinance, however sacred, but from rejecting the Saviour Himself. *This* is the condemnation, that light hath come into the world, and that men love darkness rather than light. There is no other *final* condemnation; for though the unworthy partaking of the Lord's Supper may harden the heart and increase the spiritual deadness of the soul, a man may recover himself from it by repentance and new obedience. But for the rejection of Christ there is no remedy; for how can we escape if we neglect the only name given under heaven among men by whom we can be saved?

All these popular mistakes regarding the true nature and design of the Lord's Supper, are dispelled when we reverently follow the man bearing the pitcher of water, and enter into the upper chamber where it was first instituted. There we find a simple family meal. There we breathe an atmosphere of purest love. There Jesus is present in the lowliest guise. He appears at His own table, not in the splendid radiance of heaven, but in the humblest form of the Man of Sorrows, touched with a fellow-feeling of our infirmities. He lifts those who fall trembling at His feet to lie on His bosom at meat; and they can feel as the elders of Israel felt, when it was said of them that "they saw God, and did eat and drink."

But it will be observed that Jesus never lets us get too familiar with Him, lest we should forget what is due to Him, and presume too much. Amid the humblest appearances there is always something to show to us that it is the Lord of Glory with whom we have to do. The star of heaven hung over His cradle, and the vision of angels lighted up the darkness of His sepulchre. And here the homely incidents of the man carrying the pitcher of water, and of the upper room in the unknown citizen's house, are redeemed from their homeliness by Christ's divine fore-knowledge of them, by His telling the disciples that they should find these things exactly as He had told them. Thus in the lowliest circumstances He manifested Himself as a prophet who foretold future events,

and a king who ruled men's hearts and lives, and the circumstances of society, so that all should turn out exactly as He had decreed and intimated. And does not this greatness in the midst of lowliness indicate to us that He will make the common things used in His service sacred? The pitcher of water He can change into the cup of wine. The upper chamber in which He is received becomes a sanctuary—a temple. We give ourselves to Him sinners, and He gives us back to ourselves saints.

Let us open our door, therefore, to the Master of the feast, that He may sup with us and we with Him. There was no room for Him in the inn on earth. Let there be room in our hearts for Him. Let the upper chamber of the soul be prepared for Him and furnished with love; and there He will reveal Himself to us in the breaking of bread, and show to us His hands and His side, and we shall be glad when we thus see the Lord.

Let the significant lesson of the man carrying the pitcher of water, pointing the way to the upper room, teach us that so every act or circumstance of our ordinary life, however homely, should have reference to and prepare for the Holy Supper as often as we are called upon to observe it. We should so live every day that no special preparation need be made for our sitting down at the Lord's Table; that wherever we are, and however engaged, we may always be in a suitable frame of mind to enjoy the Holy Communion. And when we rise from the sacred feast and engage in the ordinary pursuits of life, let us not feel as if we had worked ourselves up into an unreal mood for a mystic ceremony, and had thus purchased an indulgence to let ourselves down again to the level of the world when it is over, but let the Holy Supper blend with our common life. Let it not be a thing apart; but let its sanctifying influence be with us always. Let our whole life, religious and secular, be woven of one piece, like the Saviour's seamless coat; or beaten out of one lump of gold, like the mercy-seat and the cherubims overshadowing it. Let us bear about with us daily the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the pure and holy life of Jesus may be made manifest in our mortal flesh. Whether we eat or drink, or whatsoever we do, let us do all to the glory of God. And so our daily carrying, as it were, of the pitcher of water for household purposes, the daily business of our life, will lead to and prepare for the perpetual communion feast of heaven.

New Rendering of Job xix. 23:27.

THE very remarkable translation of the Book of Job by Professor Hoffmann of Kiel, which was recently given to the public after circulating for some time in manuscript amongst the author's students, deals with the best known, but perhaps most difficult, passage in this magnificent but obscure Hebrew poem—Job's appeal to a living redeemer or avenger—in a startling but suggestive way. The whole passage is rendered as follows:—

"Oh that my words were written down in a book, registered with a pen of iron upon lead, graven for a testimony on the rocks! I know that an avenger lives for me, who will at last present himself here below. Then would this (the inscription mentioned above) after my skin bring him down (lit. 'beat him down,' *herab-klopfen*); and I, even parted from the flesh, should show God (to you), whom (at present) I alone behold, and my eyes see, and no other; (after whom) my reins languish within me."

The three most striking features in this novel translation are: (a) The reference of "this" not to "body" understood, but to the inscription on papyrus, or lead, or stone, after which Job longs; (b) the treatment of *לְבָבִי*, not as a plural, but as a singular with pronominal suffix, and the application to this passage of the meaning which the Niphal has in Isa. x. 34; (c) the substitution in ver. 27 of *אֶחָדָה* for *אֶחָדָה*. Professor Hoffmann's quaint note in explanation of his rendering of *לְבָבִי*, or as he thinks to be possible *לְבָבִי*, also merits quotation.

"This inscription will bring down Him, the Avenger of blood, like an olive which cannot be reached with the hand, from the top of the tree, that is, from heaven. The inscription represents 'the blood' of xvi. 18. Constantly reminded by it instead of by Job's spoken words, the God of Job would appear visibly to all and justify him after his death before the world."

Professor Hoffmann evidently had in view in his rendering of *לְבָבִי* the cognate noun *לְבָבִי*, which is used only of the beating down of olives from the tree. Although it is scarcely probable that this new rendering will meet with general acceptance, it is, at any rate, deserving of careful study as a clever contribution to the study of a passage which critics are tempted to give up in despair as hopelessly corrupt.

W. TAYLOR SMITH.

Manchester.