

MARY OF BETHANY,

IDENTICAL WITH

THE WOMAN OF NAIN IN THE SEVENTH OF LUKE.

FROM
"MISCELLANEOUS PAPERS,"
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"Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound."

Romans v. 20.

THERE are two ways of reading John xi. 2. The first is, "It was that Mary which anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick." The second is, (omitting the word "*that*," which is not in the Greek, as the English reader may know from its being *in italics*,) "It was Mary which anointed the Lord with ointment," &c. Now if we adhere to the former of these two readings, the conclusion is, that the passage refers to the action in the following chapter (John xii. 1-8) in which case the stress must be laid upon the word "*that*," pointing,

as it would do in this case, to Mary the sister of Lazarus, who is there presented as anointing the Lord's feet in the way here described. But if, omitting the word "*that*," (which, as I have said, does not occur in the original) and laying the emphasis *on the name*, we read "It was *Mary* which anointed the Lord with ointment," &c., we cannot surely with any consistency connect it with the narrative in John xii. 1-8, because in this latter passage Mary is *definitely named as the one who thus acted*, and therefore it would be wholly unmeaning and needless to refer to her thus in the foregoing chapter.

To what then, if this be the case, does the passage thus read bear relation? Not, I believe, to the twelfth chapter of John, but to the seventh of Luke. There we find a woman doing the very same thing that Mary of Bethany did; while we are not told who she was, or what was her name. Here, however, we find who she was who thus honoured her Lord. Here the secret comes out, "it was" (as we read, laying, observe,

the stress on *the name*,) "Mary which anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick." Thus the despised outcast of Nain, the forgiven one in the Pharisee's house, she who loved much, because of the deep sense she had of the pardoning love, the abounding grace of her Lord, turns out to be the devoted worshipping Mary of Bethany, who afterwards anointed Him in the house of Simon the leper.

This view of the subject, I am aware, will be distasteful to those who realizing Mary of Bethany only in the interesting light in which she is presented in Luke x., John xi., xii., refuse to believe that she can possibly be the "woman in the city, which was a sinner," whom a self-righteous Pharisee shrank from, as being unworthy of entering his house. (Luke vii. 36-50.) But what if the Lord's object herein is not so much to tell of the grace that was in her, as to magnify His own grace in redeeming her from evil, in making her one of His people? This we believe to

be the fact, and that in not beginning with Mary in the seventh chapter of Luke, we should drop the first link of the chain of her history, the object of which is to trace the path of one emerging from the lowest depths of degradation and sorrow, and never turning aside till she had reached that height of ineffable joy which she tasted when she anointed the feet of her Lord in the house of Simon the leper.

And now we will rapidly go through her history, our object herein being to show how consistently it all hangs together, what a tale of mercy it is, what a blessed illustration of the truth of that word in Romans v. 20 "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound."

Our first view of Mary (as we shall now assume her to be) is in the house of Simon the Pharisee (Luke vii. 36-50), in the city of Nain, where, an alien from those whom she loved, she had been leading a dissolute life. There, at the Pharisee's table, the Lord had been re-

ceived as a guest, and there she approaches Him, not as a stranger, but as one to whom her heart was attracted, one from whom she had learnt the great secret of happiness. How she first came to know Him, we are not told. May it not have been at that moment when, at the gate of the city, He raised the young man, the only son of the widow, to life? Much people of the city we find was with the sorrowing mother, and she, Mary, perhaps, was one of that number, or more probably, lonely and friendless, and yet hardened in evil, she, like the strange woman in the second of Proverbs, was passing carelessly on, when all of a sudden a scene such as she never witnessed before burst on her view, and the voice of that heavenly stranger, of that wonderful man, "the man of the gate of Nain," as a beloved brother was accustomed to call Him, fell on her ear, saying "Young man, I say unto thee, Arise," words which, while they called back his spirit, at the same time reached the heart of the poor outcast of Bethany, telling her

that there was happiness even for her, that there was one who could fill the void in her craving desolate heart. This it was which led her, regardless of man, of the social order of life, to make her way into the banqueting-room of Simon the Pharisee, there to bathe with her tears and her ointment the feet of Him, who in so unlooked-for a way, had taken possession of her heart, there to get the sweet and blessed assurance from Him that her offering was accepted, that her sins, which were many, were forgiven.

And now we pass on to the tenth chapter of the same Gospel, and there we find her again, as before, at the feet of her Lord (her natural place it seems, in each case), learning lessons of divine and heavenly wisdom from Him who had forgiven her sins. No longer the broken-hearted penitent that she was, but a happy saint, in sweet communion with Him who had spoken peace to her heart. Nor is she alone, as before, a disconsolate outcast, no, she has found a home with her kindred ; her brother and

sister, reflecting the grace which Jesus had shown her, having forgiven and forgotten the past, have received the wanderer back. They are not however at *Bethany, the true home of this family*, but at a "*certain village*," the name of which is not told us. How, we may well ask, is this? A question which perhaps may be answered in this way; that Mary having brought disgrace on herself and on them, they had none of them courage as yet to face their friends and their kindred, and so they tarry awhile at this village, before they return to Bethany.

And now we come to the eleventh chapter of John, where we find the scene changed altogether, the family are again at their own home at Bethany, alas, to them a desolate home, death having entered the scene, and taken Lazarus away from his sisters. But is this all? No, it is not, the triumph of death is but for a moment; the Lord being on His way, at the call of his sisters, to awaken the sleeping one, to call Lazarus back from the grave. Thus

we see Mary again at His feet, the sweetest spot to her in the world, there to learn fully to know Him as "THE RESURRECTION, AND THE LIFE:" she who, as we venture to assume, had witnessed the miracle at the gate of the city, which had witnessed her shames, had seen the young man raised to life, now beholds the marvel repeated in the case of her brother.

What wonder then if, in the following chapter (John xii. 1—8), we find her in the house of Simon the leper, anointing the feet ("beautiful" beyond all thought in her eyes, Is. lii. 7) of Him to whom she is so deeply indebted; what wonder if her ointment of spikenard, so costly, so fragrant, that it filled the house with its odour, should have been treasured up by her till that moment, when, as she knew through some divine instinct within her, the day of His burying was near. Not as a penitent here, as in the house of Simon of Nain, but as a worshipper, we find her honouring Him thus in the house of Simon of Bethany. And that too without any reproach, or

resentment, on the part of either the host or the guests ; Christ having dealt with her in grace, as He had done, He would not suffer her to be shut out (as some would fain shut her out, as unworthy of being there) from this supper table where He Himself was a guest. He would incline the hearts of others to receive her as He Himself had received her ; would find a place for His forgiven disciple among the honoured of Israel. This is surely sufficient to silence one of the common, we must call them *self-righteous*, objections as to the identity of Mary with the penitent in the seventh of Luke. And this, we may add, is to us a very interesting thought, savouring as it does more of *grace* than of *law*, more of *God* than of *man*. And it is here I would say that if my conjecture is right as to the manner and time of her meeting the Lord, namely, when He raised the young man at the gate of the city, it is interesting also to bear in mind that in each case her act is connected with *death and resurrection*, that the grace shown to the widow of

Nain and her son, and that which had been vouchsafed to herself and her family, should have led to the same result in the two different cases, to her anointing the feet of her Lord.

Thus in a rapid way I have gone through this interesting history, my object, as I have said, being to show how the links of the chain depend on each other, that it is in truth the story of *one and the same individual*. Such I believe the unprejudiced mind will own it to be, on a careful comparison of these four scriptures one with another. (Luke vii. 36—50, x. 38—42, John xi. 1—2, xii. 1—8.) To those who are willing to give up the vain notion of discovering aught that is good in the creature, and to trace the ways of the God of all grace in His word, it will be evident that she who anoints the Lord in the city of Nain, is the same that anoints Him again at the supper in Bethany, that the despised outcast whose name was a reproach and a by-word, among the names of the daughters of Israel, was the one whose report was to go forth to the whole

world linked with the record of that exquisitely significant act so sweetly expressive of the devotion, the love of her worshipping spirit.

SWEET was the hour, O Lord, to thee,
 At Sychar's lonely well,
 When a poor outcast heard thee there
 Thy great salvation tell.

Thither she came; but oh! her heart,
 All fill'd with earthly care,
 Dream'd not of thee, nor thought to find
 The Hope of Israel there.

Lord! 'twas thy power unseen that drew
 The stray one to that place,
 In solitude to learn from thee
 The secrets of thy grace.

There Jacob's erring daughter found
 Those streams unknown before,
 The waterbrooks of life that make
 The weary thirst no more.

And, Lord, to us, as vile as she,
 Thy gracious lips have told
 That mystery of love reveal'd
 At Jacob's well of old.

In spirit, Lord, we've sat with thee
 Beside the springing well
 Of life and peace—and heard thee there
 Its healing virtues tell.

Dead to the world, we dream no more
 Of earthly pleasures now;
 Our deep, divine, unfailing spring
 Of grace and glory thou!

No hope of rest in aught beside,
 No beauty, Lord, we see;
 And, like Samaria's daughter, seek,
 And find our all in thee.

SWEETER, O Lord, than rest to thee,
 While seated by the well,
 Was the blest work that led thee there,
 Of grace and peace to tell.

One thoughtless heart, that never knew
 The pulse of life before,
 There learn'd to love—was taught to sigh
 For earthly joys no more.

Friend of the lost, O Lord, in thee
 Samaria's daughter there
 Found One whom love had drawn to earth,
 Her weight of guilt to bear.

Fair witness of thy saving grace,
 In her, O Lord, we see;
 The wandering soul by love subdued,
 The sinner drawn to thee.

Through all that sweet and blessed scene,
 Dear Saviour, by the well,
 More than enough the trembler finds
 His guilty fears to quell.

There, in the blest repose of faith,
 The soul delights to see
 Not only One who fully loves,
 But *Love itself* in thee.

Not One alone who feels for all,
But knows the wondrous art
Of meeting all the sympathies
Of every loving heart.

