

## "WHO WENT ABOUT DOING GOOD."

The Roman centurion of Capharnaum was in sore trouble. A servant very dear to him lay at the point of death, every effort to save him had proved unavailing, and now his master, as tender by the sickbed as he was brave in battle, watched beside him and waited for the end. Suddenly it was told in the house that Jesus of Nazareth was entering the city. The centurion had heard of His deeds of mercy, and hope sprang up in his heart. Thinking himself unworthy as a Gentile to approach the great Prophet, he sent to Him the ancients of the Jews. And when they had come to Jesus they besought Him earnestly, saying:

"He is worthy that Thou shouldst do this for him, for he loveth our nation and he hath built us a synagogue." And Jesus went with them. And when He was near the house the centurion met Him, and, falling on his knees before Him, said:

"Lord, trouble not Thyself, for I am not worthy that Thou shouldst enter under my roof, but say the word and my servant shall be healed. For I also am a man subject to authority having under me soldiers; and I say to this one: Go, and he goeth, and to another: Come, and he cometh, and to my servant : Do this, and he doth it." As though he had said : "If the word of one who is himself a subject meets with prompt obedience, how much more will the word of Him who is Almighty be obeyed." And Jesus hearing, marvelled, and, turning to them that followed Him, said:

"Amen, I say to you, I have not found so great faith in Israel." The faith and frankness of this Roman soldier delighted Him:

"Go," He said, " and as thou hast believed, so be it done to thee." And the servant was healed at the same hour.

We should like to know what became of one whose faith won the admiration of the Son of God. This at least we know, that the Church sets him before us as a model. In the solemn moment when we are receiving Jesus Christ into our hearts, she puts upon our lips as our most fitting preparation the Domine, non sum dignus of the centurion.

One evening our Lord, attended by the Twelve and by the vast crowd that always followed Him now, began to climb the hill on which stood the little city of Nain. As He neared the gate a sad procession streamed out—first, women weeping and wailing and beating their breasts; then, flute players with their mournful music; then, a bier on which lay the body of a young man wound round and round with linen cloths. A great throng of people followed, not only because the Jews held it to be a religious duty to accompany the dead to the grave, but also because this was " the only son of his mother, and she was a widow." Our Lord saw her among the hired mourners, and His heart was filled with pity. Making His way through the crowd, He came to her and said:

"Weep not." She looked up bewildered, and her red eyes met the divine compassion of His. Then He led her to the bier and touched it. The bearers stood still and laid their burden on the ground. There was a thrill of expectation all around. The procession broke up, the crowds mingled, and a breathless multitude closed round Him. For a moment He stood there looking down on the boyish face. Then in a tone of authority that none who heard it could ever forget, He said:

"Young man, I say to thee, arise!" Instantly the eyes opened, the marble cheek flushed, and he that was dead sat up and began to speak. His mother fell on her knees, and, with tears of joy streaming down her face, stretched out her arms to her boy. A great awe fell upon the people, and for some momenta there was silence. "There came a great fear on them all," says St. Luke, " and they glorified God." This was always the effect of our Lord's wonderful works on the simple folk that followed Him—fear because God was so near, thanksgiving and praise because God was so pitying and so good.

We notice that it is chiefly the poor who form the audience of our Blessed Lord when He preaches. They are attracted to Him. He is one of themselves, they feel at home with Him. But one day there appears in their midst a listener whose attire and bearing show nothing of the simplicity and bashfulness of the poor. Her dress is of the richest, her veil thrown back displays the costly gems that hang from her ears and gleam on her forehead and in her hair. What can she, with her perfumes and long braided tresses and embroidered sandals, be doing here ? Has she come, like a Pharisee, to scoff at the Master? Her humble neighbours eye her with curiosity and no little indignation. For this is Mary Magdalen, whom all the city knows, and who all the city would say is here strangely out of place.. Yet here she stands, her gaze riveted on the Speaker yonder.

An hour ago she was passing this way, and, attracted by the crowd, drew near to see Him who had just raised to life the widow's son. And now she stands, swaying with the throng, heeding nothing but Him, impatient only when some movement in front hides Him from her sight.

His sermon ended, He goes away, and the crowd breaks up. Yet, still, she stands there, gazing after Him. She had darted forward as if to follow Him, but looking down upon her dress came back with a sigh. She watches now till He is out of sight, then, drawing her veil over her face, hastens home.

Some hours later Simon, the Pharisee, is dining with a party of friends in a room that opens into a courtyard. Handsome lamps, couches with rich cushions for the head and arms, tables laden with choice wines, figs, grapes, pomegranates—all show a wealthy home. Near the tables, which form three sides of a square, are placed the low couches on which the guests recline, their feet stretching back from the tables.

Among those present is Jesus of Nazareth, whose Name since the miracle of Nain is in every mouth. Simon has invited Him, but has not thought it necessary to show Him any

further courtesy. He is only a carpenter and will not expect it. So no water was offered Him for His feet when He came in. There was no kiss of welcome from His host, and He took His place, not on the couches reserved for " the worthiest but with the less distinguished guests. The meal is nearly over when one of the rabbis present points with a contemptuous expression of surprise to the couch on which Jesus reclines. A woman is kneeling there at His feet. Her dress is coarse, her long hair streams loosely over her shoulders and face, and on the floor beside her stands an alabaster box of precious ointment. Her tears are falling fast upon His feet, and as they fall she wipes them away with her hair. Again and again she stoops and kisses His feet. And then she takes the box and breaks it over them, and the fragrance of the perfume fills the house. Simon is indignant. How dares Mary Magdalen enter his house! And how is it Jesus of Nazareth does not drive her away? If He were a prophet He would surely know that she is a sinner. From His lowly place Jesus looks at Simon and says:

"Simon, I have somewhat to say to thee." And he says :

"Master, say it."

"A certain creditor had two debtors, the one owed five hundred pence and the other fifty. And as they had not wherewith to pay, he forgave them both. Which, therefore, of the two loveth him most? " Simon answers in a surly tone :

"I suppose he to whom he forgave most." And Jesus says to him:

"Thou hast judged rightly." Then, turning to the woman, He says to Simon:

"Seest thou this woman? I entered into thy house, thou gavest Me no water for My feet, but she with tears hath washed My feet, and with her hair hath wiped them. Thou gavest Me no kiss, but she since she came in hath not ceased to kiss My feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint, but she with ointment hath anointed My feet. Wherefore I say to thee many sins are forgiven her because she hath loved much. But to whom less is forgiven, he loveth less." And He says to her:

"Thy sins are forgiven thee." At once all the company begin to think: " Who is this that forgiveth sins also ? " Jesus takes no notice of them, but says to the woman:

"Thy faith hath made thee safe, go in peace." Not one word had Magdalen spoken, either of sorrow for her sins or in self-defence. She let her Lord speak for her, she trusted herself to Him. Not by words but by her tears, and kiss, and costly gift she showed Him her contrition. And she knew from His own words that not one of her loving acts had escaped Him. He had accepted all. And now she goes away, her heart full of peace and joy, teaching us all by her example not to be afraid of our merciful Lord when we have sinned, but to go to Him like her with our sorrow and our love, and like her we shall be forgiven. Magdalen never forgot that much had been forgiven her. To try to repay her Lord with loving service

this was her one aim now. With other holy women who had become His disciples, Joanna, wife of Herod's steward, Mary of Salome, Mary of Cleophas, and many others, she followed Him about and provided for His wants. For we must remember that from the time He left Nazareth He had no home, and with His twelve Apostles depended on the charity of those who believed in Him and loved Him. "

The foxes have holes and the birds of the air nests," He said, " but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head." These holy women were devoted to Him, faithful and brave when even Apostles wavered, but bravest and most faithful of all was Mary Magdalen. Where His Blessed Mother lived during the three years of the Public Life we are not told: some think she remained at Nazareth, others that she settled with her relatives at Capharnaum. Twice we find her mentioned in the Gospel. Jesus was speaking one day to the multitude when a man in the crowd said to Him:

"Behold Thy Mother and Thy brethren stand without seeking to speak to Thee."

Our Lord would not interrupt His teaching, and again taught the lesson given long years ago in the Temple, that before any call of affection, however holy, however tender, must come His Father's business. Answering him that told Him, He said:

"Who is My Mother and who are My brethren?" And stretching forth His hand towards His disciples He said:

"Behold My Mother and My brethren. For whosoever shall do the Will of My Father that is in Heaven, the same is My brother and sister and Mother. Again, when a woman in the crowd, filled with admiration for the Son, had broken out into words of blessing on the Mother, Jesus said:

"Yea, rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it." He did not mean that as Mother of God Mary is not blessed among women, but that she is more blessed for hearing His words and doing His will, for that habit of pondering in her heart of which St. Luke tells us twice in the same chapter.

"Hail, full of grace!" said Gabriel first. And then "Blessed art thou among women."