

PARABLE XVI.

THE TWO DEBTORS.

LUKE vii. 41-43.

IT may be taken as agreed on by all that the two earlier Evangelists and the last, in their several records of the anointing of Christ by a woman, refer to one and the same event (Matt. xxvi. 7 ; Mark xiv. 3 ; John xii. 3). The question whether St. Luke refers to the same, and the woman in his Gospel, '*which was a sinner,*' be Mary the sister of Lazarus, as then must follow, is more difficult, and has been variously answered from earliest times in the Church. The main arguments for the identity not merely of three, but of all four relations are, first, the name Simon, as that of the giver of the feast on one occasion (Luke vii. 40), and most probably so on the other, for he certainly is the master of the house where it was given (Matt. xxvi. 6) ; secondly, the unlikelihood that the Lord should have been twice honoured in so very unusual a manner ; and thirdly, the further unlikelihood that there should have been twice on the part of some present a misinterpretation of the homage offered, and an offence taken.

To all this it may be fairly replied, that the name Simon was much too common among the Jews for any stress to be laid upon its recurrence.¹ Then, too, the anointing of the feet

¹ Besides these *two*, as I take them, there are nine Simons mentioned in the New Testament : Simon Peter (Matt. iv. 18) ; Simon Zelotes (Luke vi. 15) ; Simon, one of the Lord's brethren (Matt. xiii. 55) ; Simon of Cyrene (Matt. xxvii. 32) ; Simon, father of Judas Iscariot (John vi. 71) ; Simon Magus (Acts viii. 9) ; Simon, Peter's host at Joppa (Acts ix.

with odours or with ointments, though less usual than the anointing of the head, yet was not without precedent; ¹ the only remarkable coincidence here being, that Mary the sister of Lazarus, and the woman ‘*which was a sinner,*’ should have each wiped the feet of the Lord with the hairs of the head (Luke vii. 38; John xii. 3). If such had been any merely fantastic honour paid to the Lord, which to offer would scarcely have suggested itself to more persons than one, we might well wonder to find it on two independent occasions repeated. But regard it as an expression of homage, such as would naturally rise out of the deepest and truest feelings of the human heart, and then its repetition is nowise wonderful. And such it is; in the hair is the glory of the woman (1 Cor. xi. 15), long beautiful tresses having evermore been held as her chiefest adornment; ² while if they in the human person are highest in place and in honour, the feet are lowest in both. What then was this service, but the incorporation in an outward act, of the inward truth, that the highest and chiefest (43); Simeon, for it is the same name, who took the infant Saviour in his arms in the temple (Luke ii. 25); and Simeon called Niger, a prophet at Antioch (Acts xiii. 1).

¹ Thus Curtius, of the Indian monarchs (viii. 9): ‘The sandals are taken off and the feet anointed with perfumes;’ and Plutarch mentions, but on a peculiar occasion, wine and sweet-smelling essences as so used (Becker, *Charicles*, vol. i. p. 428). Sandals were taken off before meals, which would leave the service of the woman easy and natural to be done. Thus Terence :

Adcurrunt servi, soccos detrahunt,
Inde alii festinare, lectos sternere,
Cœnam apparare.

(‘The servants run up and pull off the sandals, then others hasten, spread the couches, and make ready the supper.’) In ancient bas-reliefs and pictures we constantly see the guests reclining with their feet bare (see the *Dict. of Gr. and Rom. Antt.* s. v. *Cœna*, p. 253).

² So the Latin poet: *Quod primum formæ decus est, cecidere capilli.* (‘Then fell the hair, of beauty the chief grace.’) And of nearly similar uses of the hair in extreme humiliation and deprecation of the divine anger we have abundant examples in profane history. Thus Livy, iii. 7: ‘On all sides are prostrate matrons, sweeping the temples with their hair and beseeching the remission of the wrath of heaven.’ Cf. Polybius, ix. 6, 3.

of man's honour and glory and beauty are lower and meaner than the lowest that pertains to God; that they only find their true place, when doing service to Him? And what wonder that He, who stirred as none else might ever do, feelings of intensest love and profoundest reverence in a multitude of hearts, should twice have been the object of this honour?—an honour, we may observe, with some differences in the motives which on the one occasion and the other called it forth. In one case, in that of Mary the sister of Lazarus, the immediately impelling motive was intense gratitude. She had found the words of Christ words of eternal life to herself, and He had crowned his gifts by restoring to her a beloved brother from the grave. The pound of ointment 'very costly' was her thank-offering; and as less of shame was mingled in her feelings, she anointed both her Lord's feet and also his head. But what brought this woman with the alabaster box of ointment to Jesus, was an earnest yearning after the forgiveness of her sins; and she, in her deep abasement of soul before Him, presumed not to approach Him nearer than to anoint his feet only, standing the while behind Him. Kissing them with those lips, with which she had so often enticed the simple (Prov. v. 3; vii. 13), and wiping with the hairs of her head, which had been so often nets with which she had entangled souls (1 Pet. iii. 3), she realized, as in an outward act, the bidding of St. Paul, 'As ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness' (Rom. vi. 19). And the precious unguent, once poured upon her own person, to enhance the unholy seduction of her charms (Judith x. 3), this she now devotes to the service of her Lord,¹ just as the women of Israel gave the looking-glasses of their vanity to be made into the laver of brass for the tabernacle (Exod. xxxviii. 8). And to the third argument it may be answered, that though the two incidents

¹ Gregory the Great (*Hom. 33 in Evang.*): 'She considered what she did, and would not abate aught in what she was doing.' The whole discourse is full of beauty.

have this in common, that in both the act was misinterpreted and some offended, yet beyond this there is no similarity. In the one instance, the Pharisee, the giver of the feast, is offended; in the other, some of the disciples, and mainly Judas: the Pharisee is offended with the Lord, Judas not so much with Him as with the woman; the Pharisee, because the Lord's conduct seems inconsistent with his reputation for holiness, but Judas from a meaner motive of covetousness. To all which we may add, that there is nothing to make probable, that Mary of the happy family circle in Bethany,¹ to whom the Lord bears such honourable testimony (Luke x. 42), had ever been aforetime one to whom the title of 'sinner,'² as it is here meant, could belong; and, as one has well urged, with the risen Lazarus at the table (John xii. 2), even this Pharisee would hardly have jumped so rapidly to his conclusion that his guest was no prophet of God after all.

These arguments appear so convincing, that one is surprised to discover how much opinion has fluctuated from the first, on the relation of these histories one to another,—the Greek fathers generally keeping them apart, while they are identified by the Latin. This last opinion, however, finally prevailed, and was almost universal from the time of Gregory

¹ Σεμνή καὶ σπουδαία (serene and serious), as a Greek father entitles her.

² 'Which was a sinner' must then mean 'which had been a sinner,' but had long since repented and chosen the better part; even as the history must be here altogether out of its place, for the anointing by Mary immediately preceded the Lord's death, being for his burial (Matt. xxvi. 12). Many do thus understand the words to refer to sins long ago committed, and long ago forsaken; as Grotius, partly moved thereto by the necessities of his *Harmony*, which admits but one anointing, and partly, afraid as he was of the Gospel of the grace of God, by his dread of antinomian tendencies in the other interpretation; this same fear making another expositor affirm, that her sin was no worse than an overfondness for dress. Had the woman, however, long since returned to the paths of holiness, even the Pharisee himself would hardly have taken so ill the gracious reception which she found, or spoken of her as *being*, not as *having been*, a sinner. We should rather with Augustine (*Serm.* 99) consider this as the turning moment of her life: 'She came unto the Lord impure to return pure, she came sick to return healed.'

the Great, who threw all his weight into this scale, until the times of the Reformation. Then, when the Scriptures were again subjected to a more critical examination, the other interpretation gradually became prevalent anew, and had for some while been recognized almost without a dissentient voice, till Schleiermacher not very long ago, and more lately Hengstenberg, have maintained, and both with singular ability,¹ that the anointing happened but once.² But to enter further on this debate would be alien to the present purpose: and the passage containing the parable of the Two Debtors will be considered without any reference to the histories in the other Gospels, with which, as I am convinced, it has certain accidental coincidences, but this is all.

Our Lord had been invited by one of the Pharisees, and this was not the only occasion, for see Luke xi. 37, that He would eat with him; He was as prompt to accept the invitation of a Pharisee as of a chief publican, for one needed Him as much as did the other; '*and he went into the Pharisee's house, and sat down to meat.*' That a woman, and one not better reputed than this woman was, should have pressed into the guest-chamber, uninvited by the master of the house or by the Lord, and should have there been permitted to offer to him the homage which she did, may seem strange;—yet does not require the supposition of something untold to explain it, as that she was related to Simon (Hengstenberg thinks she was his sister-in-law, Simon being for him the husband of Martha), or lived in the same house,—suppositions altogether foreign to the narrative, not to say in contradiction

¹ Hengstenberg has bestowed an immense amount of labour on the endeavour to prove the identity of Mary the sister of Lazarus, and the woman that was a sinner; and also the further identity of Mary Magdalene with these two;—or with this one, as he regards her. To my mind he has failed altogether; but no one knows all which can be said on that side of the question, who has not read his treatise, for it is nothing less (*Evangelium des Johannes*, vol. ii. pp. 198–224), on the matter. It is a singular display of rare, but wasted, ingenuity.

² For a good sketch of the controversy see Deyling, *Obs. Sac.* vol. iii. p. 291.

to it. A little acquaintance with the manners of the East, where meals are so public, where ranks are not separated by such rigid barriers as with us, will make us understand how easily all recorded here might have happened; ¹ not to say that, even had there been obstacles insuperable to another, or to herself in another state of mind, these would easily have been put aside, or broken through, by an earnestness such as now possessed her; it being the very nature of such an earnestness to break through and despise these barriers, nor ever to ask itself whether, in the world's judgment, it be 'in season,' or 'out of season.' ²

¹ I quote the following in confirmation: 'At dinner at the Consul's house at Damietta we were much interested in observing a custom of the country. In the room where we were received, besides the divan on which we sat, there were seats all round the walls. Many came in and took their place on those side-seats, uninvited and yet unchallenged. They spoke to those at table on business or the news of the day, and our host spoke freely to them. This made us understand the scene in Simon's house at Bethany, where Jesus sat at supper, and Mary came in and anointed his feet with ointment; and also the scene in the Pharisee's house, where the woman who was a sinner came in uninvited and yet not forbidden, and washed his feet with her tears. We afterwards saw this custom at Jerusalem, and there it was still more fitted to illustrate these incidents. We were sitting round Mr. Nicolayson's table, when first one, and then another stranger opened the door, and came in, taking their seat by the wall. They leant forward and spoke to those at the table.' (*Narrative of a Mission to the Jews from the Church of Scotland in 1839.*)

² Augustine (*Enarr. in Ps. cxl. 4*): 'She, the unchaste, who once had been forward unto fornication, now yet more forward unto health, forced her way into a strange house;' and again (*Serm. xcix. 1*): 'Ye see this notorious woman . . . how she burst in uninvited upon the feast where her physician was sitting, and with pious shamelessness sought out her cure, bursting in unseasonably for the feast, but seasonably for her own aiding;' and Gregory the Great (*Hom. 33 in Evang.*): 'Because she perceived the pollution of her foulness, she hastened to the fount of compassion to be washed, and was not abashed before the guests; for because within herself she was sorely abashed before her own self, she thought it nothing that she should be shamed in public;' and another (Bernard, *Opp. vol. ii. p. 601*): 'Thanks be to thee, O most blessed of sinful women; thou hast shown the world a place where sinners may find safety enough, even the feet of Jesus, which spurn no

In the thoughts which passed through the heart of the Pharisee,—displeased that the Lord, so far from repelling, graciously accepted the homage of this suppliant,—the true spirit of a Pharisee betrays itself,¹ unable to raise himself above a ceremonial defilement, or to understand of holiness as standing in aught save the purifying of the flesh.² In the conclusion to which he arrives, ‘*This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is,*’ we trace the prevailing belief, that discerning of spirits was one of the notes of a true prophet, above all of the greatest prophet of all, the Messiah,—a belief founded on Isai. xi. 3, 4 (see 1 Kin. xiv. 6; 2 Kin. i. 3; v. 26); nor can it be doubted that such a power of searching hearts is in the New Testament and with a certain emphasis claimed continually for the Lord (Matt. ix. 12; xii. 24; John i. 47–49; ii. 25; iv. 29; vi. 61).³ The Pharisee in fact mentally put the Lord into this dilemma,—Either He does not know the true character of this woman, in which case He lacks that discernment man, reject no man, repel no man, but welcome all and receive all. There assuredly the Æthiopian changeth her skin, there the leopard changeth its spots; there only the Pharisee can help casting aside his pride.’

¹ Augustine: ‘He had holiness in his body, but not in his heart, and because he had it not in his heart, assuredly that which he had in his body was false.’ Cf. *Enarr. in Ps. c. 5*; cxxv. 2; and Gregory the Great (*Hom. 34 in Evang.*): ‘True justice feels compassion, false justice scorn.’—As a specimen of similar notions of holiness current among the Jews, a commentator on Prov. v. 8 puts this very question: ‘To what distance should we draw aloof from a prostitute? Rabbi Chasda answers: To four cubits’ (Schoettgen, *Hor. Heb.* vol. i. p. 348). And again, p. 303, various Rabbis are extolled for the precautions which they took to keep lepers at a distance; for example, by flinging stones at them if they approached too near.

² Bernard, in a beautiful passage (*De Dedic. Ecc. Serm. 4*), styles him, ‘That Pharisee who murmured against the physician engaged in his work of healing, and was angered with the sick woman who was being cured.’

³ Vitringa (*Obs. Sac.* vol. i. p. 479) has an interesting and instructive essay (*De Signis a Messia edendis*) on the expectations of the Jews concerning the miracles which the Messiah was to perform, and by which He should legitimate his pretensions.

of spirits which marks a true prophet ; or, if He knows, and yet endures her touch, and is willing to accept homage at such hands, He lacks that holiness which is no less the note of a prophet of God ; such therefore in either case He cannot be. As these thoughts passed through his mind, he may have already repented of the superfluous honour he had shown to one, whose pretensions to a mission from God he had in this summary way convinced himself were unfounded.

The Lord shows that He is indeed a discerner of the thoughts of hearts, by reading at once what is passing in *his*. Laying his finger without more ado on the tainted spot which was there, He says, '*Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee.*' The other cannot refuse to hear ; nor has he so entirely renounced all faith in the higher character of his guest, but that he still addresses Him with an appellation of respect : '*Master, say on.*' With this leave to speak asked and obtained, the parable is uttered : '*There was a certain creditor which had two debtors : the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty.*' In the words themselves there is no difficulty, but in their application one or two will presently claim to be considered. God, it needs not to say, is the creditor, men the debtors (Matt. xviii. 24), and sins the debts (Matt. vi. 12). The sums named, '*five hundred pence,*' and '*fifty,*' vary indeed, but not at all in the same proportion as those in the parable of the Unmerciful Servant (Matt. xviii. 24, 28). There one owes ten thousand talents, and another a hundred pence, —an enormous difference, even as the difference is enormous between the sins which a man commits against God, and those which his fellow-man may commit against him ; here the difference is immeasurably less, the sums varying only in the proportion of ten to one, for no such incalculable diversity exists between the sins which one man and another commit against God.

'*And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most ? Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly*

judged. Our difficulties meet us in the transfer of what is here said, from the natural world to the spiritual. Are we to conclude, as at first might appear, that there is any advantage in having multiplied transgressions; in owing to God a large debt rather than a small; that the wider one has wandered from God, the closer, if brought back at all, he will cleave to Him afterwards? the more sin, the more love? Would it not then follow, 'Let us do evil, that good may come,'—let us sin much now, that hereafter we may love much, avoiding that lukewarmness of affections which will be their condition that have sinned but little? And must we not then conclude, that for a man to have been preserved from gross offences in the time before he was awakened to a deeper religious earnestness,—or, better still, to have grown out of his baptismal root,—this, instead of being a matter of everlasting thanksgiving, would interpose an effectual barrier to any very near and high communion of love with his Saviour? And to understand the passage thus, would it not involve a moral contradiction,—that the more a man has emptied himself of good,—the more he has laid waste all nobler affections and powers,—the deeper his heart has sunk in selfishness and sensuality (for sin is all this), the more capable he will be of the highest and purest love?

But the whole matter is clear, if we contemplate the debt, not as an *objective*, but a *subjective* debt,—not as so many outward transgressions and outbreaks of evil, but as so much conscience of sin; which we know is nowise in proportion to a man's actual and positive violations of God's law. Often they who have least of what the world can call sin, or rather crime (for the world, as such, knows nothing of sin), have the strongest sense of the exceeding sinfulness of sin, are most conscious of it as a root of bitterness within them, and therefore, as they have most groaned under the evil, are the most thankful for the gift of a Redeemer. But '*he to whom little is forgiven*' is not necessarily one who has sinned little. but one who lacks any strong conviction of the malignity of sin, and of his own share in the universal disease; who

therefore, while he may have no serious objection to God's plan of salvation, nay, a cold respect, as had this Pharisee, for Christ, yet esteems that he could have done as well, or nearly as well, without Him. He loves little, because he has little sense of a deliverance wrought for him; because he never knew what it was to lie under the curse of a broken law, and then by that Saviour to be set free, and brought into the liberty of the children of God.¹

Simon himself was an example of one who thus loved little, who having little sense of sin, but slightly felt his need of a Redeemer, and therefore loved that Redeemer but little; and he had betrayed this faintness of his love in small yet significant matters. Counting the invitation itself a sufficient honour done to his guest, he had withheld from Him courtesies almost universal in the East; had neither given Him water for the feet (Gen. xviii. 4; Judg. xix. 21; 1 Tim. v. 10), nor offered Him the kiss of peace (Gen. xxxiii. 4; Exod. xviii. 7), nor anointed his head with oil, as was ever the custom at festivals (Ps. xxiii. 5; cxli. 5; Matt. vi. 17). But while *he* had fallen thus short of the customary courtesies, that woman had far exceeded them. He had not poured water on the Saviour's feet; she had washed them, not with water, but with her tears—the blood of her heart,² as Augustine calls them, and then wiped them with the hairs of her head; he had not given the single kiss of salutation on the cheek, she had multiplied kisses, and those upon the feet; he had not

¹ Augustine (*Serm.* xcix. 4) freely acknowledges the stress of this difficulty: 'For I am told, if he to whom little is forgiven loves little, but he to whom more is forgiven loves more, and it is better to love more than to love less, then ought we to sin greatly . . . that we may more fully love the remitter of our heavy debts;' and again: 'If I find that he loves more to whom more sins have been forgiven, then was the greatness of his sin to his advantage, yea, the greatness of his iniquity was to his advantage, in avoiding a lukewarm love.' And he solves it as is done above: 'O Pharisee, thou lovest but little because thou deemest that little is forgiven thee; not because but little is forgiven, but because thou thinkest that which is forgiven thee to be but little.' Compare a beautiful sermon by Schleiermacher (*Predigten*, vol. i. p. 524).

² 'She poured forth tears, the blood of the heart.'

anointed the head of Jesus with ordinary oil, but she with precious ointment had anointed even his feet.

'Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.' An embarrassment, by all acknowledged, lies on the face of these words: first, how to bring them into agreement with the parable, for in that the debtor is said to love much, because forgiven much, and not to be forgiven much, because he loved much; and again, how to bring them into agreement with the general tenor of Scripture, which ever teaches that we love God, because He first loved us,—that faith is the one previous condition of forgiveness, and not love, which is not a condition at all, but a consequence. Some have felt these difficulties so strongly, that in their fear lest the Roman Catholics should draw any support for their *fides formata* from the passage,—which indeed they are willing enough to do,—they have affirmed that the word designating the cause stands for that designating the consequence,—that '*her sins are forgiven, for she loved much,*' means '*her sins are forgiven, therefore she loved much.*'¹ But, in the first place, she did not as yet know her sins to be forgiven,—the absolving words are only spoken in the verse following;—and moreover, this escape from a doctrinal embarrassment, by violence done to the plain words of the text, will find no favour with them who believe that in the interpretation of Scripture, as of any other book grammar, and the laws of human speech, should first be respected; that the doctrine can take care of itself, and will never in the end be found in contradiction with itself. And as regards advantage which Roman Catholic controversialists would fain draw from the passage, such, whatever the explanation, there can be none. The parable stands in the heart of the narrative, an insuperable barrier against such. He who owed the larger debt is not forgiven it as freely as the other is his smaller debt, *because* of the greater love which

¹ They make $\delta\tau\iota = \delta\iota\acute{o}$, and very idly appeal to John viii. 44; 1 John iii. 14, in confirmation: see Winer, *Gramm.* § 57, p. 536.

he before felt towards the creditor;¹ but, on the contrary, the sense of a larger debt remitted makes him afterwards love him that remitted it more. Moreover, were it meant that her sins were forgiven, because—in their sense who would make charity justify, and not faith,²—she loved much, the other clause in the sentence would necessarily be, ‘*but he who loveth little, to the same little is forgiven.*’

But the words, ‘*for she loved much,*’ may best be explained by considering what the strong sorrow for sin, and the earnest desire after forgiveness, such as this woman displayed, mean, and from whence they arise. Surely from a deep sense in the sinner’s heart, that by his sins he has separated himself from that God who is Love, while yet he cannot do without his love,—from a feeling that the heart must be again permitted

¹ Incredible as it will appear, this is actually the interpretation of Maldonatus (ad loc.): ‘*Which of them will love him most?*’ is only, he affirms, a popular way of saying, ‘*Which of them did love him most?*’—which may you conclude from the effect to have had most affection for him, and therefore to have been dearest to him, he to whom he remitted a large debt, or he to whom he only remitted a small?—He claims Euthymius and Augustine as agreeing with him; the latter certainly without right.

² I quote here some remarkable words of Coleridge (*Literary Remains*, vol. ii. p. 368), on the attempt thus to substitute charity for faith in the justification of a sinner. ‘*To many, to myself formerly, it has appeared a mere dispute about words: but it is by no means of so harmless a character; for it tends to give a false direction to our thoughts, by diverting the conscience from the ruined and corrupted state in which we are without Christ. Sin is the disease. What is the remedy?—Charity?—Pshaw! Charity in the large apostolic sense of the term is the health, the state to be obtained by the use of the remedy, not the sovereign balm itself,—faith of grace,—faith in the God-manhood, the cross, the mediation, the perfected righteousness of Jesus, to the utter rejection and abjuration of all righteousness of our own! Faith alone is the restorative. The Romish scheme is preposterous;—it puts the rill before the spring. Faith is the source,—charity, that is, the whole Christian life, is the stream from it. It is quite childish to talk of faith being imperfect without charity; as wisely might you say that a fire, however bright and strong, was imperfect without heat; or that the sun, however cloudless, is imperfect without beams. The true answer would be: It is not faith,—but utter reprobate faithlessness.*’

to love Him, again assured of his love towards it, else it will utterly wither and die. Sin unforgiven is felt to be the great hindrance to this; and the desire after forgiveness,—if it be not a mere selfish desire after personal safety, in which case it can be nothing before God,—is the desire for the removal of this hindrance, that so the heart may be free to love and to know itself beloved again. This desire then is itself love at its negative pole; not as yet made positive, for the absolving word of grace can alone make it this. It is the flower of love desiring to bud and bloom, but not venturing to put forth its petals in the chilling atmosphere of God's anger; but which will do this at once, when to the stern winter of his wrath the genial spring of his love succeeds. In this sense that woman 'loved much.' All that she did attested the intense yearning of her heart after a reconciliation with a God of love, from whom she had separated herself by her sins. All her tears and her services witnessed how much she yearned to be permitted to love Him and to know herself beloved of Him; and on account of this her love, which, in fact, was faith¹ (see ver. 50, 'Thy faith hath saved thee'), she obtained forgiveness of her sins. This acknowledgment that a life apart from God is not life but death, with the conviction that in God there is fulness of grace and blessing, and that He is willing to impart of this fulness to all who bring the vessels of empty hearts to be filled by Him; this, call it faith or initiatory love, is what alone makes man receptive of any divine gift; and this the Pharisee, in the self-sufficiency of his legal righteousness,² had

¹ Very distinctly Theophylact (in loc.): 'Because she loved much, another way of saying, because she showed great faith,' and presently before he calls all which she had been doing for her Saviour, 'signs of faith and love.' Ser Gerhard, *Loc. Theoll.* loc. xvi. 8. 1.

² The *Bustan* of the famous Persian poet Saadi (Tholuck, *Bluthensamml. aus d. Morgenl. Mystik*, p. 251) has a story which sounds like an echo of this evangelical history. Jesus, while on earth, was once entertained in the cell of a dervisch of eminent reputation for sanctity. In the same city dwelt a youth sunk in every sin, 'whose heart was so black that Satan himself shrunk back from it in horror;' he, appearing before the cell of the monk, as smitten by the very presence of the Divine prophet, began to lament deeply the wickedness of his life past, and shedding

scarcely at all ; he therefore deriving little or no profit from that nearness to Christ into which by God's gracious providence he was brought. But that woman had it in large measure ; she therefore bore away the choicest and best blessing which the Son of God had to bestow ; to her those words of joy were spoken, '*Thy sins are forgiven*' (cf. Luke v. 20). Many were offended ; '*they that sat at meat with him began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also ?*' offended as others before at a similar bestowal of pardon had been (Matt. ix. 2, 3 ; Mark ii. 7), yet not venturing openly to utter their displeasure ; He meanwhile, not disconcerted by these murmurs of theirs, but implicitly reasserting his claim to forgive sins, followed up one word of grace and power by another, '*Thy faith hath saved thee* (cf. Mark x. 52 ; Matt. ix. 29) ; *go in peace ;*' and thus in her it was fulfilled, that 'where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.'

abundant tears, to implore pardon and grace. The monk indignantly interrupted him, demanding how he dared to appear in his presence and in that of God's holy prophet ; assured him that for him there was no forgiveness ; and in proof how inexorably he considered his lot was fixed for hell, exclaimed, 'My God, grant me but one thing, that I may stand far from this man on the judgment-day.' On this Jesus spoke : 'It shall be even so : the prayer of both is granted. This sinner has sought mercy and grace, and has not sought them in vain,—his sins are forgiven,—his place shall be in Paradise at the last day. But this monk has prayed that he may never stand near this sinner,—his prayer too is granted,—hell shall be his place, for there this sinner shall never come.'