

CHAPTER VI

THE YEAR OF OPPOSITION

Paragraphs 116-118. The Change of Sentiment towards Him.

119-135. THE CAUSES OF OPPOSITION.

119-131. Opposition of the Influential Classes.

119. The Sadducees.

120-130. The Pharisees' Reasons for opposing Him.

122, 123. Their Preconceptions; 124. His Lowly Origin; 125. His Followers; 126. His Disregard of Traditions; 127. The Sabbath; 128, 129. Imputations of Blasphemy and Alliance with the Evil One; 130. Progress of their Opposition.

131. Herod.

132-135. Alienation of the Common People.

132. Popular Opinions of Him; 133. Effect of the Feeding of the Five Thousand; 134. Refusal of Jesus to be their King.

136-143. THE CHANGED ASPECT OF HIS MINISTRY.

136-138. The Sifting of the Disciples.

137. Wanderings with them in Remote Parts, their Great Confession; 138. Prediction of His Sufferings, their Blindness.

139-142. His Own Thoughts and Feelings at this Period.

140. Prayerfulness; 141. The Transfiguration; 142. Departure from Galilee and Journey to Jerusalem.

143. The Sanhedrim resolves on His Death.

CHAPTER VI

THE YEAR OF OPPOSITION

116. For a whole year Jesus pursued His work in Galilee with incessant energy, moving among the pitiable crowds that solicited His miraculous help and seizing every opportunity of pouring His words of grace and truth into the ears of the multitude or of the solitary anxious inquirer. In hundreds of homes, to whose inmates He had restored health and joy, His name must have become a household word; in thousands of minds, whose depths His preaching had stirred, He must have been cherished with gratitude and love. Wider and wider rang the echoes of His fame. For a time it seemed as if all Galilee were to become His disciples, and as if the movement so set agoing might easily roll southward, overbearing all opposition, and enveloping the whole land in an enthusiasm of love for the Healer and of obedience to the Teacher.

117. But the twelve months had scarcely passed when it became sadly evident that this was not to be. The Galilean mind turned out to be stony ground, where the seed of the kingdom rushed quickly up, but just as quickly withered away. The change was sudden and complete, and at once altered all the features of the life of Jesus. He lingered in Galilee for six months longer; but these months were very unlike the first twelve. The voices that rose around Him were no longer the ringing shouts of gratitude and applause, but voices of opposition, bitter and blasphemous. He was no longer to be seen moving from one populous place to another in the heart of the country,

welcomed everywhere by those who waited to experience or to see His miracles, and followed by thousands eager not to lose a word of His discourses. He was a fugitive, seeking the most distant and outlandish places, and accompanied only by a handful of followers. At the six months' end He left Galilee forever, but not, as might at one time have been anticipated, borne aloft on the wave of public acknowledgment, to make an easy conquest of the hearts of the southern part of the country, and take victorious possession of a Jerusalem unable to resist the unanimous voice of the people. He did indeed labor for six months more in the southern part of the land—in Judæa and Peræa—nor were there wanting, where His miracles were seen for the first time, the same signs of public enthusiasm as had greeted Him in the first months of joy in Galilee; but the most which He effected was to add a few to the company of His faithful disciples. He did, indeed, from the day He left Galilee, set His face steadfastly towards Jerusalem; and the six months He spent in Peræa and Judæa may be regarded as occupied with a slow journey thither; but the journey was begun in the full assurance, which He openly expressed to the disciples, that in the capital He was to receive no triumph over enthusiastic hearts and minds convinced, but meet with a final national rejection, and be killed instead of crowned.

118. We must trace the causes and the progress of this change in the sentiment of the Galileans, and this sad turn in the career of Jesus.

119. From the very first the learned and influential classes had taken up an attitude of opposition to Him. The more worldly sections of them, indeed—the Sadducees and Herodians—for a long time paid little attention to Him. They had their own affairs to mind—their wealth, their court influence, their amusements. They cared little for a religious movement going on among the lower orders.

The public rumor that one professing to be the Messiah had appeared did not excite their interest, for they did not share the popular expectations on the subject. They said to each other that this was only one more of the pretenders whom the peculiar ideas of the populace were sure to raise up from time to time. It was only when the movement seemed to them to be threatening to lead to a political revolt, which would bring down the iron hand of the Roman masters on the country, afford the Procurator an excuse for new extortions, and imperil their property and comforts, that they roused themselves to pay any attention to Him.

120. Very different was it, however, with the more religious sections of the upper class—the Pharisees and scribes. They took the deepest interest in all ecclesiastical and religious phenomena. A movement of a religious kind among the populace excited their eager attention, for they themselves aimed at popular influence. A new voice with the ring of prophecy in it, or the promulgation of any new doctrine or tenet, caught their ear at once. But, above all, anyone putting himself forward as the Messiah produced the utmost ferment among them; for they ardently cherished Messianic hopes, and were at the time smarting keenly under the foreign domination. In relation to the rest of the community, they corresponded to our clergy and leading religious laymen, and probably formed about the same proportion of the population, and exercised at least as great an influence as these do among us. It has been estimated that they may have numbered about six thousand. They passed for the best persons in the country, the conservators of respectability and orthodoxy; and the masses looked up to them as those who had the right to judge and determine in all religious matters.

121. They cannot be accused of having neglected Jesus. They turned their earnest attention to Him from the first. They followed Him step by step. They discussed His

doctrines and His claims, and made up their minds. Their decision was adverse, and they followed it up with acts, never becoming remiss in their activity for an hour.

122. This is perhaps the most solemn and appalling circumstance in the whole tragedy of the life of Christ—that the men who rejected, hunted down and murdered Him, were those reputed the best in the nation, its teachers and examples, the zealous conservators of the Bible and the traditions of the past—men who were eagerly waiting for the Messiah, who judged Jesus, as they believed, according to the Scriptures, and thought they were obeying the dictates of conscience and doing God service when they treated Him as they did. There cannot fail sometimes to sweep across the mind of a reader of the Gospels a strong feeling of pity for them, and a kind of sympathy with them. Jesus was so unlike the Messiah whom they were looking for and their fathers had taught them to expect! He so completely traversed their prejudices and maxims, and dishonored so many things which they had been taught to regard as sacred! They may surely be pitied; there never was a crime like their crime, and there was never punishment like their punishment. There is the same sadness about the fate of those who are thrown upon any great crisis of the world's history, and, not understanding the signs of the times, make fatal mistakes; as those did, for example, who at the Reformation were unable to go forth and join the march of Providence.

123. Yet, at bottom, what was their case? It was just this, that they were so blinded with sin that they could not discern the light. Their views of the Messiah had been distorted by centuries of worldliness and unspirituality, of which they were the like-minded heirs. They thought Jesus a sinner, because He did not conform to ordinances which they and their fathers had profanely added to those of God's Word, and because their conception of a good man, to which He did not answer, was utterly false. Jesus

supplied them with evidence enough, but He could not give them eyes to see it. There is a something at the bottom of hearts that are honest and true, which, however long and deeply it may have been buried under prejudice and sin, leaps up with joy and desire to embrace what is true, what is reverend, what is pure and great, when it draws near. But nothing of the kind was found in them: their hearts were seared, hardened, and dead. They brought their stock rules and arbitrary standards to judge Him by, and were never shaken by His greatness from the fatal attitude of criticism. He brought truth near them, but they had not the truth-loving ear to recognize the enchanting sound. He brought the whitest purity, such as archangels would have veiled their faces at, near them, but they were not overawed. He brought near them the very face of mercy and heavenly love, but their dim eyes made no response. We may, indeed, pity the conduct of such men as an appalling misfortune, but it is better to fear and tremble at it as appalling guilt. The more utterly wicked men become, the more inevitable it is that they should sin; the vaster the mass of a nation's sin becomes, as it rolls down through the centuries, the more inevitable does some awful national crime become. But when the inevitable takes place, it is an object not for pity only, but also for holy and jealous wrath.

124. One thing about Jesus which from the first excited their opposition to Him was the humbleness of His origin. Their eyes were dazzled with the ordinary prejudices of the rich and the learned, and could not discern the grandeur of the soul apart from the accidents of position and culture. He was a son of the people; He had been a carpenter; they believed He had been born in rude and wicked Galilee; He had not passed through the schools of Jerusalem or drunk at the acknowledged wells of wisdom there. They thought that a prophet, and above all the Messiah, should have been born in Judæa, reared at Jeru-

saalem in the center of culture and religion, and allied with all that was distinguished and influential in the nation.

125. For the same reason they were offended with the followers He chose and the company He kept. His chosen organs were not selected from among themselves, the wise and high-born, but were uneducated laymen, poor fishermen. Nay, one of them was a publican. Nothing that Jesus did, perhaps, gave greater offence than the choice of Matthew, the tax-gatherer, to be an apostle. The tax-gatherers, as servants of the alien power, were hated by all who were patriotic and respectable, at once for their trade, their extortions, and their character. How could Jesus hope that respectable and learned men should enter a circle such as that which He had formed about Himself? Besides, He mingled freely with the lowest class of the population—with publicans, harlots, and sinners. In Christian times we have learned to love Him for this more than anything else. We easily see that, if He really was the Savior from sin, He could not have been found in more suitable company than among those who needed salvation most. We know now how He could believe that many of the lost were more the victims of circumstances than sinners by choice, and that, if He drew the magnet across the top of the rubbish, it would attract to itself many a piece of precious metal. The purest-minded and highest-born have since learned to follow His footsteps down into the purlieus of squalor and vice to seek and save the lost. But no such sentiment had up till His time been born into the world. The mass of sinners outside the pale of respectability were despised and hated as the enemies of society, and no efforts were made to save them. On the contrary, all who aimed at religious distinction avoided their very touch as defilement. Simon the Pharisee, when he was entertaining Jesus, never doubted that, if He had been a prophet and known who the woman was who was touching

Him, He would have driven her off. Such was the sentiment of the time. Yet when Jesus brought into the world the new sentiment, and showed them the divine face of mercy, they ought to have recognized it. If their hearts had not been utterly hard and cruel, they would have leapt up to welcome this revelation of a diviner humanity. The sight of sinners forsaking their evil ways, of wicked women sobbing for their lost lives, and extortioners like Zaccheus becoming earnest and generous, ought to have delighted them. But it did not, and they only hated Jesus for His compassion, calling Him a friend of publicans and sinners.

126. A third and very serious ground of their opposition was, that He did not Himself practice, nor encourage His disciples to practice, many ritual observances, such as fasts, punctilious washing of the hands before meals, and so forth, which were then considered the marks of a saintly man. It has been already explained how these practices arose. They had been invented in an earnest but mechanical age in order to emphasize the peculiarities of Jewish character, and keep up the separation of the Jews from other nations. The original intention was good, but the result was deplorable. It was soon forgotten that they were merely human inventions; they were supposed to be binding by divine sanction; and they were multiplied, till they regulated every hour of the day and every action of life. They were made the substitutes for real piety and morality by the majority; and to tender consciences they were an intolerable burden, for it was scarcely possible to move a step or lift a finger without the danger of sinning against one or other of them. But no one doubted their authority, and the careful observance of them was reputed the badge of a godly life. Jesus regarded them as the great evil of the time. He therefore neglected them, and encouraged others to do so; not, however, without at the same time leading them back to the great principles of

judgment, mercy, and faith, and making them feel the majesty of the conscience and the depth and spirituality of the law. But the result was, that He was looked upon as both an ungodly man Himself, and a deceiver of the people.

127. It was especially in regard to the Sabbath that this difference between Him and the religious teachers came out. In this field their inventions of restrictions and arbitrary rules had run into the most portentous extravagance, till they had changed the day of rest, joy, and blessing into an intolerable burden. He was in the habit of performing His cures on the Sabbath. They thought such work a breach of the command. He exposed the wrongness of their objections again and again, by explaining the nature of the institution itself as "made for man," by reference to the practice of ancient saints, and even by the analogy of some of their own practices on the holy day. But they were not convinced; and, as He continued His practice in spite of their objections, this remained a standing and bitter ground of their hatred.

128. It will be easily understood that, having arrived at these conclusions on such low grounds, they were utterly disinclined to listen to Him when He put forward His higher claims—when He announced Himself as the Messiah, professed to forgive sins, and threw out intimations of His high relation to God. Having concluded that He was an impostor and deceiver, they regarded such assertions as hideous blasphemies, and could not help wishing to stop the mouth which uttered them.

129. It may cause surprise, that they were not convinced by His miracles. If He really performed the numerous and stupendous miracles which are recorded of Him, how could they resist such evidence of His divine mission? The debate held with the authorities by the tough reasoner whom Jesus cured of blindness, and whose case is recorded in the ninth chapter of John, shows how

sorely they may sometimes have been pressed with such reasoning. But they had satisfied themselves with an audacious reply to it. It is to be remembered that among the Jews miracles had never been looked upon as conclusive proofs of a divine mission. They might be wrought by false as well as true prophets. They might be traceable to diabolical instead of divine agency. Whether they were so or not, was to be determined on other grounds. On these other grounds they had come to the conclusion that He had not been sent from God; and so they attributed His miracles to an alliance with the powers of darkness. Jesus met this blasphemous construction with the utmost force of holy indignation and conclusive argument; but it is easy to see that it was a position in which minds like those of His opponents might entrench themselves with a sense of much security.

130. Very early they had formed their adverse judgment of Him, and they never changed it. Even during His first year in Judæa they had pretty well decided against Him. When the news of His success in Galilee spread, it filled them with consternation, and they sent deputations from Jerusalem to act in concert with their local adherents in opposing Him. Even during His year of joy He clashed with them again and again. At first He treated them with consideration and appealed to their reason and heart. But He soon saw that this was hopeless and accepted their opposition as inevitable. He exposed the hollowness of their pretensions to His audiences and warned His disciples against them. Meanwhile they did everything to poison the public mind against Him. They succeeded only too well. When, at the year's end, the tide of His popularity began to recede, they pressed their advantage, assailing Him more and more boldly.

131. They even succeeded thus early in arousing the cold minds of the Sadducees and Herodians against Him,

no doubt by persuading them that He was fomenting a popular revolt, which would endanger the throne of their master Herod, who reigned over Galilee. That mean and characterless prince himself also became His persecutor. He had other reasons to dread Him besides those suggested by his courtiers. About this very time he had murdered John the Baptist. It was one of the meanest and foulest crimes recorded in history, an awful instance of the way in which sin leads to sin, and of the malicious perseverance with which a wicked woman will compass her revenge. Soon after it was committed, his courtiers came to tell him of the supposed political designs of Jesus. But when he heard of the new prophet, an awful thought thrilled through his guilty conscience. "It is John the Baptist," he cried, "whom I beheaded, he is risen from the dead." Yet he desired to see Him, his curiosity getting the better of his terror. It was the desire of the lion to see the lamb. Jesus never responded to his invitation. But just on that account Herod may have been the more willing to listen to the suggestion of his courtiers that he should arrest Him as a dangerous person. It was not long before he was seeking to kill Him. Jesus had to keep out of his way, and no doubt this helped, along with more important things, to change the character of His life in Galilee during the last six months of His stay there.

132. It had seemed for a time as if His hold on the mind and the heart of the common people might become so strong as to carry irresistibly a national recognition. Many a movement, frowned upon at first by authorities and dignitaries, has, by committing itself to the lower classes and securing their enthusiastic acknowledgment, risen to take possession of the upper classes and carry the centers of influence. There is a certain point of national consent at which any movement which reaches it becomes like a flood, which no amount of prejudice or official dislike

can successfully oppose. Jesus gave Himself to the common people of Galilee, and they gave Him in return their love and admiration. Instead of hating Him like the Pharisees and scribes, and calling Him a glutton and a wine-bibber, they believed Him a prophet; they compared Him with the very greatest figures of the past, and many, according as they were more struck with the sublime or with the melting side of His teaching, said He was Isaiah or Jeremiah risen from the dead. It was a common idea of the time that the coming of the Messiah was to be preceded by the rising again of some prophet. The one most commonly thought of was Elijah. Accordingly some took Jesus for Elijah. But it was only a precursor of the Messiah they supposed Him to be, not the Messiah Himself. He was not at all like their conception of the coming Deliverer, which was of the most grossly material kind. Now and then, indeed, after He had wrought some unusually striking miracle, there might be raised a single voice or a few voices, suggesting, Is this not He? But, wonderful as were His deeds and His words, yet the whole aspect of His life was so unlike their preconceptions, that the truth failed to suggest itself forcibly and universally to their minds.

133. At last, however, the decisive hour seemed to have arrived. It was just at that great turning-point to which allusion has frequently been made—the end of the twelve months in Galilee. Jesus had heard of the Baptist's death, and immediately hurried away into a desert place with His disciples, to brood and talk over the tragic event. He sailed to the eastern side of the lake, and landing on the grassy plain of Bethsaida, went up to a hill with the Twelve. But soon at its foot there gathered an immense multitude to hear and see Him. They had found out where He was, and gathered to Him from every quarter. Ever ready to sacrifice Himself for others, He descended to address and heal them. The evening came on, as His discourse

prolonged itself, when, moved with a great access of compassion for the helpless multitude, He wrought the stupendous miracle of feeding the five thousand. Its effect was overwhelming. They became instantaneously convinced that This was none other than the Messiah, and, having only one conception of what this meant, they endeavored to take Him by force and make Him a king; that is, to force Him to become the leader of a Messianic revolt, by which they might wrest the throne from Cæsar and the princelings he had set up over the different provinces.

134. It seemed the crowning hour of success. But to Jesus Himself it was an hour of sad and bitter shame. This was all that His year's work had come to! This was the conception they yet had of Him! And they were to determine the course of His future action, instead of humbly asking what He would have them to do! He accepted it as the decisive indication of the effect of His work in Galilee. He saw how shallow were its results. Galilee had judged itself unworthy of being the center from which His kingdom might extend itself to the rest of the land. He fled from their carnal desires, and the very next day, meeting them again at Capernaum, He told them how much they had been mistaken in Him: they were looking for a Bread-king, who would give them idleness and plenty, mountains of loaves, rivers of milk, every comfort without labor. What He had to give was the bread of eternal life.

135. His discourse was like a stream of cold water directed upon the fiery enthusiasm of the crowd. From that hour His cause in Galilee was doomed; "many of His disciples went back and walked no more with Him." It was what He intended. It was Himself who struck the fatal blow at His popularity. He resolved to devote Himself thenceforward to the few who really understood Him and were capable of being the adherents of a spiritual enterprise.

136. **The Changed Aspect of His Ministry.**—Yet, although the people of Galilee at large had shown themselves unworthy of Him, there was a considerable remnant that proved true. At the center of it were the apostles; but there were also others, to the number, probably, of several hundreds. These now became the objects of His special care. He had saved them as brands plucked from the burning, when Galilee as a whole deserted Him. For them it must have been a time of crucial trial. Their views were to a large extent those of the populace. They also expected a Messiah of worldly splendor. They had indeed learned to include deeper and more spiritual elements in their conception, but, along with these, it still contained the traditional and material ones. It must have been a painful mystery to them that Jesus should so long delay the assumption of the crown. So painful had this been to the Baptist in his lonely prison, that he began to doubt whether the vision he had seen on the bank of the Jordan and the great convictions of his life had not been delusions, and sent to ask Jesus if He really was the Christ. The Baptist's death must have been an awful shock to them. If Jesus was the Mighty One they thought Him, how could He allow His friend to come to such an end? Still they held on to Him. They showed what it was which kept them by their answer to Him, when, after the dispersion which followed the discourse at Capernaum, He put to them the sad question, "Will ye also go away?" They replied, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." Their opinions were not clear; they were in a mist of perplexities; but they knew that from Him they were getting eternal life. This held them close to Him, and made them willing to wait till He should make things clear.

137. During the last six months He spent in Galilee, He abandoned to a large extent His old work of preaching and miracle-working, and devoted Himself to the instruc-

tion of these adherents. He made long circuits with them in the most distant parts of the province, avoiding publicity as much as possible. Thus we find Him at Tyre and Sidon, far to the northwest; at Caesarea-Philippi, on the far northeast; and in Decapolis, to the south and east of the lake. These journeys, or rather flights, were due partly to the bitter opposition of the Pharisees, partly to fear of Herod, but chiefly to the desire to be alone with His disciples. The precious result of them was seen in an incident which happened at Caesarea-Philippi. Jesus began to ask His disciples what were the popular views about Himself, and they told Him the various conjectures which were flying about—that He was a prophet, that He was Elias, that He was John the Baptist, and so on. “But whom say ye that I am?” He asked; and Peter answered for them all, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” This was the deliberate and decisive conviction by which they were determined to abide, whatever might come. Jesus received the confession with great joy, and at once recognized in those who had made it the nucleus of the future Church, which was to be built on the truth to which they had given expression.

138. But this attainment only prepared them for a new trial of faith. From that time, we are told, He began to inform them of His approaching sufferings and death. These now stood out clearly before His own mind as the only issue of His career to be looked for. He had hinted as much to them before, but, with that delicate and loving consideration which always graduated His teaching to their capacity, He did not refer to it often. Now, however, they were in some degree able to bear it; and, as it was inevitable and near at hand, He kept insisting on it constantly. But they themselves tell us they did not in the least understand Him. In common with all their countrymen, they expected a Messiah who should sit on the throne of David, and of whose reign there should be no end. They believed Jesus

was this Messiah; and it was to them utterly incomprehensible that, instead of reigning, He should be killed on His arrival in Jerusalem. They listened to Him, they discussed His words among themselves, but they regarded their apparent meaning as a wild impossibility. They thought He was only using one of the parabolic sayings of which He was so fond, His real meaning being that the present lowly form of His work was to die and disappear, and His cause rise, as it were, out of the grave in a glorious and triumphant shape. He endeavored to undeceive them, going more and more minutely into the details of His approaching sufferings. But their minds could not take the truth in. How completely even the best of them failed to do so is shown by the frequent wranglings among them at this period as to which of them should in the approaching kingdom be the greatest, and by the request of Salome for her sons, that they should sit the one on the right and the other on the left hand in His kingdom. When they left Galilee and went up towards Jerusalem, it was with the conviction that “the kingdom of God should immediately appear,”—that is, that Jesus, on arriving in the capital, would throw off the guise of humiliation He had hitherto worn, and, overcoming all opposition by some forthputting of His concealed glory, take His place on the throne of His fathers.

139. What were the thoughts and feelings of Jesus Himself during this year? To Him also it was a year of sore trial. Now for the first time the deep lines of care and pain were traced upon His face. During the twelvemonth of successful work in Galilee, He was borne up with the joy of sustained achievement. But now He became, in the truest sense, the Man of Sorrows. Behind Him was His rejection by Galilee. The sorrow which He felt at seeing the ground on which He had bestowed so much labor turning out barren, is to be measured only by

the greatness of His love to the souls He sought to save, and the depth of His devotion to His work. In front of Him was His rejection at Jerusalem. That was now certain; it rose up and stood out constantly and unmistakably, meeting His eyes as often as He turned them to the future. It absorbed His thoughts. It was a terrible prospect; and, now that it drew nigh, it sometimes shook His soul with a conflict of feelings which we scarcely dare to picture to ourselves.

140. He was very much in prayer. This had all along been His delight and resource. In his busiest period, when He was often so tired with the labors of the day that at the approach of evening He was ready to fling Himself down in utter fatigue, He would nevertheless escape away from the crowds and His disciples to the mountain-top, and spend the whole night in lonely communion with His Father. He never took any important step without such a night. But now He was far oftener alone than ever before, setting forth His case to His God with strong crying and tears.

141. His prayers received a splendid answer in the Transfiguration. That glorious scene took place in the middle of the year of opposition, just before He quitted Galilee and set forth on the journey of doom. It was intended partly for the sake of the three disciples who accompanied Him to the mountain-top, to strengthen their faith and make them fit to strengthen their brethren. But it was chiefly intended for Himself. It was a great gift of His Father, an acknowledgment of His faithfulness up to this point, and a preparation for what lay before Him. It was about the decess He was to accomplish at Jerusalem He conversed with His great predecessors, Moses and Elias, who could thoroughly sympathize with Him, and whose work His death was to fulfil.

142. Immediately after this event He left Galilee and went south. He spent six months on His way to Jerusalem.

It was part of His mission to preach the kingdom over the whole land, and He did so. He sent seventy of His disciples on before Him to prepare the villages and towns to receive Him. Again in this new field the same manifestations as Galilee had witnessed during the first months of His labors there showed themselves—the multitudes following Him, the wonderful cures, and so forth. We have not records of this period sufficient to enable us to follow Him step by step. We find Him on the borders of Samaria, in Peræa, on the banks of the Jordan, in Bethany, in the village of Ephraim. But Jerusalem was His goal. His face was set like a flint for it. Sometimes He was so absorbed in the anticipation of what was to befall Him there, that His disciples, following His swift, mute figure along the highway, were amazed and afraid. Now and then, indeed, He would relax for a little, as when He was blessing the little children or visiting the home of His friends at Bethany. But His mood at this period was more stern, absorbed, and highly strung than ever before. His contests with His enemies were sharper, the conditions which He imposed on those who offered to be His disciples more stringent. Everything denoted that the end was drawing near. He was in the grip of His grand purpose of atoning for the sins of the world, and His soul was straitened till it should be accomplished.

143. The catastrophe drew nigh apace. He paid two brief visits to Jerusalem, before the final one, during His last six months. On both occasions the opposition of the authorities assumed the most menacing form. They endeavored to arrest Him on the first occasion, and took up stones to stone Him on the second. They had already issued a decree that anyone acknowledging Him to be the Messiah should be excommunicated. But it was the excitement produced in the popular mind by the raising of Lazarus at the very gates of the ecclesiastical citadel which finally convinced the authorities that they could not satisfy

themselves with anything short of His death. So they resolved in council. This took place only a month or two before the end came, and it drove Him for the time from the neighborhood of Jerusalem. But He retired only until the hour which His Father had appointed Him should strike.