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***MEMORIES
OF BETHANY***

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Memories of Bethany

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LUKE X. 38-42.—“And He entered into a certain village: and a certain woman named Martha received Him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus’ feet, and heard His word. But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to Him, and said, Lord, dost Thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me. And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.”

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Bethany in connexion with the Sickness, Death, and Resurrection of Lazarus.

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JOHN XI. 1.—“Now a certain *man* was sick, *named* Lazarus, of BETHANY, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. (It was *that* Mary which anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick.) Therefore his sisters sent unto Him, saying, Lord, behold, he whom Thou lovest is sick. When Jesus heard *that*, He said, This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby. Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus. When He had heard therefore that he was sick, He abode two days still in the same place where He was.”

“And after that He saith unto them, Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep. Then said His disciples, Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well. Howbeit Jesus spake of His death: but they thought that He had spoken of taking of rest in sleep. Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead. And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe; nevertheless, let us go unto him.”

“Then, when Jesus came, He found that he had *lain* in the grave four days already. (Now BETHANY was nigh unto Jerusalem, about fifteen furlongs off.) And many of the Jews came to Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother. Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met Him: but Mary sat *still* in the house. Then said Martha unto Jesus, Lord, if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give *it* Thee. Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again. Martha saith unto Him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day. Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: He that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth, and believeth in Me, shall never die. Believest thou this? She saith unto Him, Yea, Lord: I believe that Thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world. And when she had so said, she went her way, and called Mary her sister secretly, saying, The Master is come, and calleth for thee. As soon as she heard *that*, she arose quickly, and came unto Him. Now Jesus was not yet come into the town, but was in that place where Martha met Him. The Jews then which were with her in the house, and comforted her, when they saw Mary, that she rose up hastily and went out, followed her, saying, She goeth unto the grave to weep there. Then when Mary was come where Jesus was, and saw Him, she fell down at His feet, saying unto Him, Lord, if Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, He groaned in the spirit, and was troubled, and said, Where

have ye laid him? They say unto Him, Lord, come and see. Jesus wept. Then said the Jews, Behold how He loved him! And some of them said, Could not this man, which opened the eyes of the blind, have caused that even this man should not have died! Jesus therefore again groaning in Himself, cometh to the grave. It was a cave, and a stone lay upon it. Jesus said, Take ye away the stone. Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto Him, Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been *dead* four days. Jesus saith unto her, Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God? Then they took away the stone *from the place* where the dead was laid. And Jesus lifted up His eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that Thou hast heard Me. And I knew that Thou hearest Me always: but because of the people which stand by I said *it*, that they may believe that Thou hast sent Me. And when He thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with grave-clothes; and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go."

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Notices of Bethany subsequent to the Raising of Lazarus.

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JOHN XII. 1-8.—“Then Jesus, six days before the Passover, came to BETHANY, where Lazarus was which had been dead, whom he raised from the dead. There they made Him a supper; and Martha served: but Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with Him. Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment. Then saith one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon’s *son*, which should betray Him, Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor? This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein. Then said Jesus, Let her alone: against the day of My burying hath she kept this. For the poor always ye have with you; but Me ye have not always.”

MATTHEW XXVI. 12-13.—“For in that she hath poured this ointment on my body, she did *it* for my burial. Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, *there* shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her.”

JOHN XII. 9.—“Much people of the Jews therefore knew that He was there: and they came not for Jesus’ sake only, but that they might see Lazarus also, whom he had raised from the dead.”

JOHN XII. 12-15.—“On the next day much people that were come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, took branches of palm trees, and went forth to meet Him, and cried, Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel

that cometh in the name of the Lord. And Jesus, when He had found a young ass, sat thereon; as it is written, Fear not, daughter of Sion: behold, thy King cometh, sitting on an ass's colt."

MATTHEW XXI. 10-12.—"And when He was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, Who is this? And the multitude said, This is Jesus the Prophet of Nazareth of Galilee. And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the money-changers, and the seats of them that sold doves."

MARK XI. 11-15.—"And Jesus entered into Jerusalem, and into the temple: and when He had looked round about upon all things, and now the eventide was come, he went out unto BETHANY, with the twelve. And on the morrow, when they were come from Bethany, He was hungry: And seeing a fig-tree afar off having leaves, He came, if haply he might find any thing thereon: and when He came to it, He found nothing but leaves; for the time of figs was not yet. And Jesus answered and said unto it, No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever. And His disciples heard *it*. And they come to Jerusalem: and Jesus went into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the money-changers, and the seats of them that sold doves."

Verse 19-20.—"And when even was come, He went out of the city. And in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig-tree dried up from the roots."

LUKE XXIV. 50-52—"And He led them out as far as to BETHANY; and He lifted up His hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while He blessed them, He was parted from them, and carried up into Heaven. And they worshipped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy."

ACTS I. 9-12.—"And when He had spoken these things, while they beheld, He was taken up; and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And, while they looked stedfastly toward Heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into Heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into Heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into Heaven. Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the Mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a Sabbath-day's journey."

ZECHARIAH XIV. 4.—"And His feet shall stand in that day upon the Mount of Olives, which *is* before Jerusalem on the east, and the Mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, *and there shall be* a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south."

"And it shall be in that day, *that* living waters shall go out from Jerusalem; half of them toward the former sea, and half of them toward the hinder sea: in summer and in winter shall it be. And the Lord shall be King over all the earth: in that day shall there be one Lord, and his name one."

“And it shall come to pass, *that* every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of Hosts, and to keep the feast of Tabernacles.”

MEMORIES OF BETHANY

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Opening Thoughts.

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Places associated with great minds are always interesting. What a halo of moral grandeur must ever be thrown around that spot which was hallowed above all others by the Lord of glory as the scene of His most cherished earthly friendship! However holy be the memories which encircle other localities trodden by Him in the days of His flesh,—Bethlehem, with its manger cradle, its mystic star, and adoring cherubim—Nazareth, the nurturing home of His youthful affections—Tiberias, whose shores so often echoed to His footfall, or whose waters in stillness or in storm bore Him on their bosom—the crested heights where He uttered His beatitudes—the midnight mountains where

He prayed—the garden where He suffered—the hill where He died,—there is no one single resort in His divine pilgrimage on which sanctified thought loves so fondly to dwell as on the home and village of BETHANY.

Its hours of sacred converse have long ago fled. Its honoured family have slumbered for ages in their tomb. Bethany's Lord has been for centuries enthroned amid the glories of a brighter home. But though its Memories are all that remain, the place is still fragrant with His presence. The echoes of His voice—words of unearthly sweetness—still linger around it; and have for eighteen hundred years served to cheer and encourage many a fainting pilgrim in his upward ascent to the true Bethany above!

There, the Redeemer of the world proclaimed a brief but impressive Gospel. Heaven and earth seemed then to touch one another. We have the tender tones of a *Man* blended with the ineffable majesty of *God*. Hopes “full of immortality” shine with their celestial rainbow-hues amid a shower of holy tears. The cancelling from our Bibles of the 11th chapter of St John would be like the blotting out of the brightest planet from the spiritual firmament. Each of its magnificent utterances has proved like a ministering-angel—a seraph-messenger bearing its live-coal of comfort to the broken, bleeding heart from the holiest altar which SYMPATHY (divine and human) ever upreared in a trial-world! Many has been the weary footstep and tearful eye that has hastened in thought to BETHANY—“gone to the grave of Lazarus, to weep there.”

“The town of Mary and her sister Martha,” then, furnishes us alike with a garnered treasury of Christian solaces, and

one of the very loveliest of the Bible's domestic portraiture. If the story of Joseph and his brethren is in the Old Testament invested with surpassing interest, here is a Gospel home-scene in the New, of still deeper and tenderer pathos—a picture in which the true Joseph appears as the central figure, without any estrangements to mar its beauty. Often at other times a drapery of woe hangs over the pathway of the Man of Sorrows. But *Bethany* is bathed in sunshine;—a sweet *oasis* in his toil-worn pilgrimage. At this quiet abode of congenial spirits he seems to have had his main “sips at the fountain of human joy,” and to have obtained a temporary respite from unwearied labour and unmerited enmity. The “Lily among thorns” raised His drooping head in this Eden home! Thither we can follow Him from the courts of the Temple—the busy crowd—the lengthened journey—the miracles of mercy—the hours of vain and ineffectual pleading with obdurate hearts. We can picture Him as the inmate of a peaceful family, spirit blending with spirit in sanctified communion. We can mark the tenderness of His holy humanity. We can see how He loved, and sympathised, and wept, and rejoiced!

As the tremendous events which signalled the close of His pilgrimage drew on, still it is *Bethany* with which they are mainly associated. It was at *Bethany* the fearful visions of His cross and passion cast their shadow on his path! From its quiet palm-trees^[1] He issued forth on His last day's journey across Mount Olivet. It was with *Bethany* in view He ascended to heaven. Its soil was the last He trod—its homes were the last on which his eye rested when the cloud received Him up into glory. The beams of the Sun of

Righteousness seemed as if they loved to linger on this consecrated height.

We cannot doubt that many incidents regarding His oft sojournings there are left unrecorded. We have more than once, indeed, merely the simple announcement in the inspired narrative that He retired from Jerusalem all night to the village where His friend Lazarus resided. We dare not withdraw more of the veil than the Word of God permits. Let us be grateful for what we have of the gracious unfoldings here vouchsafed of His inner life—the comprehensive intermingling of doctrine, consolation, comfort, and instruction in righteousness. His Bethany sayings are for all time—they have “gone through all the earth”—His Bethany words “to the end of the world!” Like its own alabaster box of precious ointment, “wheresoever the Gospel is preached,” there will these be held in grateful memorial.

The traveller in Palestine is to this day shewn, in a sort of secluded ravine on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives (about fifteen furlongs or two miles from Jerusalem), a cluster of poor cottages, numbering little more than twenty families, with groups of palm-trees surrounding them, interspersed here and there with the olive, the almond, the pomegranate, and the fig.^[2]

This ruined village bears the Arab name of El-Azirezeh—the Arabic form of the name Lazarus—and at once identifies it with a spot so sacred and interesting in Gospel story. It is described by the most recent and discerning of Eastern writers as “a wild mountain hamlet, screened by an intervening ridge from the view of the top of Olivet—perched on its open plateau of rock—the last collection of

human habitations before the desert hills that reach to Jericho. ... High in the distance are the Peræan mountains; the foreground is the deep descent of the mountain valley.”[3]

“The fields around,” says another traveller, “lie uncultivated, and covered with rank grass and wild flowers; but it is easy to imagine the deep and still beauty of this spot when it was the home of Lazarus and his sisters, Martha and Mary. Defended on the north and west by the Mount of Olives, it enjoys a delightful exposure to the southern sun. The grounds around are obviously of great fertility, though quite neglected; and the prospect to the south-east commands a magnificent view of the Dead Sea and the plains of Jordan.”[4]

“On the horizon’s verge,
The last faint tracing on the blue expanse,
Rise Moab’s summits; and above the rest
One pinnacle, where, placed by Hand Divine,
Israel’s great leader stood, allow’d to view,
And but to view, that long-expected land
He may not now enjoy. Below, dim gleams
The sea, untenanted by ought that lives,
And Jordan’s waters thread the plain unseen.

Here, hid among her trees, a village clings—
Roof above roof uprising. White the walls,
And whiter still by contrast; and those roofs,
Broad sunny platforms, strew’d with ripening grain.
Some wandering olive or unsocial fig

Amid the broken rocks which bound the path
Snatches scant nurture from the creviced stone.”[5]

Before closing these prefatory remarks, the question cannot fail to have occurred to the most unobservant reader, why the history of the Family of Bethany and the Resurrection of Lazarus, in themselves so replete with interest and instruction—the latter, moreover, forming, as it did, so notable a crisis in the Saviour’s life—should have been recorded only by the Evangelist John. Strange that the other inspired penmen should have left altogether unchronicled this touching episode in sacred writ. One or other of two reasons—or both combined—we may accept as the most satisfactory explanation regarding what, after all, must remain a difficulty. John alone of the Gospel writers narrates the transactions which took place in *Judea* in connexion with the Saviour’s public ministry,—the others restricted themselves mainly to the incidents and events of His *Galilean* life and journeys; at all events, till they come to the closing scene of all.[6] There is another reason equally probable:—A wise Christian prudence, and delicate consideration for the feelings of the living, may have prevented the other Evangelists giving publicity to facts connected with their Lord’s greatest miracle; a premature disclosure of which might have exposed Lazarus and his sisters to the violence of the unscrupulous persecutors of the day. They would, moreover, (as human feelings are the same in every age,) naturally shrink from violating the peculiar sacredness of domestic grief by publishing circumstantially its details while the mourners and the mourned still lingered at their Bethany home. Well did they

know that that Holy Spirit at whose dictation they wrote, would not suffer “the Church of the future” to be deprived of so precious a record of divine love and power. Hence the sacred task of being the Biographer of Lazarus was consigned to their aged survivor.

When the Apostle of Patmos wrote his Gospel, as is supposed in distant Ephesus, Mary, Martha, and Lazarus were, in all likelihood, reposing in their graves. Happily so, too, for ere this the Roman armies were encamped almost within sight of their old dwelling, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem undergoing their unparalleled sufferings.

Add to this, John, of all the Evangelists, was best qualified to do justice to this matchless picture. Baptized himself with the spirit of love, his inspired pencil could best portray the lights and shadows in this lovely and loving household. Pre-eminently like his Lord, he could best delineate the scene of all others where the tenderness of that tender Saviour shone most conspicuous. He was the disciple who had leant on His bosom—who had been admitted by Him to nearest and most confiding fellowship. He would have the Church, to the latest period of time, to enjoy the same. He interrupts, therefore, the course of his narrative that he may lift the veil which enshrouds the private life of Jesus, and exhibit Him in all ages in the endearing attitude and relation of a *Human Friend*. Immanuel is transfigured on this Mount of Love before His suffering and glory! The Bethany scene, with its tints of soft and mellowed sunlight, forms a pleasing background to the sadder and more awful events which crowd the Gospel’s closing chapters.

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The Home Scene.

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The curtain rises on a quiet Judean village, the sanctuary of three holy hearts. Each of the inmates have some strongly-marked traits of individual character. These have been so often delicately and truthfully drawn that it is the less necessary to dwell minutely upon them here. There is abundant material in the narrative to discover to us, in the sisters, two characters—both interesting in themselves, both beloved by Jesus, both needful in the Church of God, but at the same time widely different, preparing by a diverse education for heaven—requiring, as we shall find, from Him who best knew their diversity, a separate and peculiar treatment.

Martha, the elder (probably the eldest of the family), has been accurately represented as the type of activity; bustling, energetic, impulsive, well qualified to be the head of the household, and to grapple with the stern realities and routine of actual life; quick in apprehension, strong and vigorous in intellect, anxious to give a reason for all she did, and requiring a reason for the conduct of others; a useful if not a noble character, combining diligence in business with fervency in spirit.

Mary, again, was the type of reflection; calm, meek, devotional, contemplative, sensitive in feeling, ill suited to battle with the cares and sorrows, the strifes and griefs of an engrossing and encumbering world; one of those gentle flowers that pine and bend under the rough blasts of life, easily battered down by hail and storm, but as ready to raise its drooping leaves under heavenly influences. Her position was at her Lord's feet, drinking in those living waters which came welling up fresh from the great Fountain of life; asking no questions, declining all arguments, gentle and submissive, a beautiful impersonation of the childlike faith which "beareth all things, hopeth all things, believeth all things." While her sister can so command her feelings as to be able to rush forth to meet her Lord outside the village, calm and self-possessed, to unbosom to Him all her hopes and fears, and even to interrogate Him about death and the resurrection, Mary can only meet Him buried in her all-absorbing grief. The crushed leaves of that flower of paradise are bathed and saturated with dewy tears. She has not a word of remonstrance. Jesus speaks to Martha—chides her—reasons with her; with Mary, He knew that the heart was too full, the wound too deep, to bear the probing of word or argument; He speaks, therefore, in the touching pathos of her own silent grief. Her melting emotion has its response in His own. In one word, Martha was one of those meteor spirits rushing to and fro amid the ceaseless activities of life, softened and saddened, but not prostrated and crushed by the sudden inroads of sorrow. Mary, again, we think of as one of those angel forms which now and then seem to walk the earth from the spirit-land; a quiet evening