

THE LAST PASSOVER NIGHT

BY

W. H. T. GAIRDNER

LONDON

SOCIETY FOR PROMOTING
CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE
NEW YORK: THE MACMILLAN CO.

1921

AUTHOR'S NOTE

PROBABLY the time has not come in England—possibly it will never come—when any Bible play or scene in which the figure of our Lord appears shall be *acted*. The object of this scene, therefore, is first to stimulate the *imagination*, and next to inform the mind, by exhibiting, in an easily intelligible form, a careful harmony of the Gospel narratives, together with the order of the Passover ritual in the time of Christ. It may thus be possible to grasp, not dryly and archæologically, but vitally and dramatically, how the new Sacrament was grafted on to the old rite. For this EDERSHEIM, with his unique combination of complete informedness, archæological exactitude, poetic warmth, and deep spiritual sympathy, has been followed. The scene is simply the dramatisation of some pages of the great “Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah,” by the scholar to whom both Jewish and Christian records were books unsealed.

N.B.—This little book is intended for study and devotional reading. The acting rights are vested in the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, which, as at present advised does not intend to grant permission for dramatic representations.

THE LAST PASSOVER NIGHT

THE SCENE IN THE UPPER ROOM ON GOOD-FRIDAY EVE

An upper room in Jerusalem, furnished and arranged ready as for reception. A low table is in the middle with cushions arranged round three sides of it. It is early in the afternoon. Enter the master of the house escorting PETER and JOHN.

MASTER OF THE HOUSE. Behold the guest-chamber where the Master may eat the Passover with His disciples.

PETER. "The Master!" Is He thy Master, too?

MASTER OF THE HOUSE. I have heard and received His teaching. Did I not surely know that He would honour this house to-night? Behold my best room. For Him and for you it has been prepared. Here make ready your Passover.

JOHN. From the moment when we saw thee meeting us bearing the pitcher of water, all has happened as He said. It is passing strange.

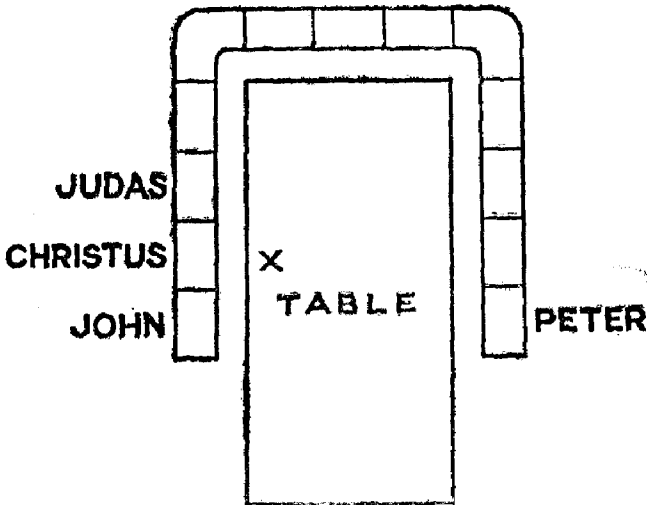
(Helped by the master of the house and his young son, MARK, they make ready the table, placing cups, platters, unleavened bread, bitter herbs. The divans (cushions placed on the floor itself) are arranged round the table as in the diagram. A special cup is placed before the divan marked X, thus denoting it as the place of the Leader.)*

* After Edersheim, ii., p. 494.

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JOHN. Make haste that we may away to the Temple to have our lamb slain. When we bring it, thou, father of Mark, art to have it roasted for us against our coming with the Master in the evening.

PETER. Who will sit in the chief place on His left this night? I know Judas will claim it, as treasurer; but it is mine by right: on me will He build His Church.



JOHN (*in an undertone*). Canst thou drink of the cup that He shall drink of, and be baptised with the baptism wherewith He shall be baptised?

[*They go out.*]

A few hours later. Sunset. There enters CHRIST, leading the twelve disciples. He goes to the place of the "Ruler of the Feast" and waits. And then arises among them a strife who is the greatest, and who, in consequence, shall take the "chief room."

JUDAS (*going quickly to the place on the left of CHRISTUS*). Ye made me your treasurer; the Keeper of the Purse

will be the Grand Vizier in the New Kingdom, as in every kingdom! I take this place.

PETER. Master, didst Thou not Thyself appoint *me* leader?

JAMES. Most true; and my brother and I were alone with thee when the Master healed Jairus's daughter, and when on Tuesday He told us about the end of the world on the Mount of Olives. We therefore come second and third.

ANDREW. Nay, I was with you then, and must at least be fourth to-night.

CHRISTUS (*silencing them by a gesture, and looking round*). The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so! But he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief as he that doth serve. For whether is greater—he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? is not he that sitteth at meat? But I am among you as he that serveth. (*They are manifestly moved to shame. He continues:*) Nay, let not your hearts be troubled! Ye are they which have continued with Me in My temptations. And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as My Father hath appointed unto Me; that ye may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

(*The fire has died out of the faces of all except*

JUDAS. PETER rushes round to the other side of the table and takes the lowest place.)

PETER (*to himself*). I begin with shame to take the lowest room!

(*They all take places indiscriminately save that*

JUDAS holds to the chief place as before.

CHRISTUS reclines on the divan at His place on His left elbow; with His right hand He signs to JOHN to occupy the place on His right.)

CHRISTUS. With what desire have I desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer! For I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God.

(The paschal meal is formally begun by the Leader's taking a cup from the cups on the table and giving thanks over it.)

Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, who hast created the fruit of the vine. *(He hands it to JUDAS.)* Take this, and divide it among yourselves; for I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come.

(When the cup has gone round He "riseth from supper," and goes to a basin placed in readiness, as though to fulfil the second rite of the evening's ritual—namely, the hand-washing after the blessing. The attention of the disciples is not particularly attracted until they observe Him put off His upper garment and gird Himself with a towel like a slave.)

ALL. Master! what doest Thou?

CHRISTUS. Said I not unto you, "I am amongst you as he that serveth"?

(He takes the basin and goes to the "lowest" end of the table where PETER is reclining; He bends over the feet of PETER and is evidently about to wash them.)

PETER. Lord, dost Thou wash my feet?

CHRISTUS. What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter.

PETER. Thou shalt never wash my feet!

CHRISTUS. If I wash thee not thou hast no part with Me.

PETER *(impetuously)*. Lord, not only my feet, but also my hands and my head!

CHRISTUS. He that has bathed has no need save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit. So ye are clean—*(in a lower voice)* but not all.

(PETER now allows the washing ; during which he hangs his head, overcome with emotion. After washing PETER'S feet He dries them with the towel wherewith He is girded, and passes to the disciple next PETER. PETER falls forward on the divan and buries his head in his hands, while silent sobs shake his frame. Similar marks of emotion, though differently expressed, are visible in each disciple as his turn comes, especially when their Master looks up into the face of each with one long, searching look.)

DISCIPLES *(whispering to each other)*. It is because we contended for the chief places !

(When He comes round to JUDAS, He looks up also into his face. JUDAS averts his with a hard stare. JESUS washes his feet also. He ends with JOHN. Alone of them all JOHN does not droop his head. He gazes at the Master with a look of ineffable love and humility. After it is all over the Master resumes His outer garment and returns to His place.)

CHRISTUS. Know ye what I have done to you ? *(A pause.)* Ye call Me Master and Lord : and ye say well ; for so I am. If I, then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord ; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.

(The paschal meal proceeds in silence. The dishes are brought to the table. The Leader dips

some of the bitter herbs into the vinegar, partakes of them, and hands to the company. Then He takes a dish of unleavened bread. He breaks a loaf and puts one half of it aside. The remainder He elevates with these words :)

This is the bread of misery which our fathers ate in the land of Egypt. All that are hungry, come and eat. All that are ready, come, keep the Passover.

(A second cup is filled. And then CHRISTUS looks to JOHN as the youngest of the party to ask the customary question.)

JOHN. What mean ye by this service ?

CHRISTUS. It is the sacrifice of the Lord's Passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt when He smote the Egyptians and delivered our houses.

(This part of the service is concluded by the singing of Psalms cxiii. and cxiv. The lamb is now placed before the Leader, who prepares for its distribution.)

CHRISTUS. With what desire have I desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer! . . . *(He is troubled.)* I speak not of you all. I know whom I have chosen: but that the scripture may be fulfilled, He that eateth bread with Me hath lifted up his heel against Me. Now I tell you before it come, that, when it is come to pass, ye may believe that I am He. Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth me; and he that receiveth Me receiveth Him that sent Me.

(A profound change has come over the expression and attitude of the Lord. He is troubled in spirit. At last He speaks as if the words were torn from Him :)

I say unto you, the truth, the truth !—*one of you shall betray Me.*

(All the disciples are electrified. They look at each other, exceedingly dismayed.)

ALL *(severally)*. Is it I, Lord ?

(Jesus, buried in His thoughts, seems not to hear.

From across the table PETER beckons to JOHN immediately opposite to him. The back of JOHN'S head is so close to the Master that it touches His breast.)

PETER *(leaning forward and whispering)*. Tell us who it is of whom He speaks.

JOHN *(with a single small movement sinks wholly into Jesus' breast, turns and lifts his head, so that he is now looking directly up into Jesus' eyes, whispering)*. Who is it, Lord ?

CHRISTUS *(collecting a piece of the lamb, a piece of the bread, and some bitter herbs, according to the rite of the evening, dips them into the basin of vinegar. To JOHN, whispering)*. He it is for whom I shall dip the sop. *(He passes it to JUDAS, as though fulfilling the usual ritual.)*

JUDAS *(taking the sop and, with a sudden awful change of countenance, echoing the question which is still heard from the others)*. Is it I, Rabbi ?

CHRISTUS *(in an undertone)*. Thou sayest it. *(Aloud, and in His usual voice)* That which thou hast to do, do quickly.

(JUDAS rises and goes out with face like the night.

JOHN watches him in silent amazement. The evening light has faded from the west ; the full moon is veiled by a thick cloud. It is night.)

PETER *(to his neighbour)*. I suppose that He has said to our treasurer, Buy what things we have need of for the feast.

ANDREW. Nay, it is that he should immediately give alms to the poor.

(When he has gone out, the attitude of the Master expresses the relief of one who, now relieved of an incubus and a terrible embarrassment, is able freely to give himself to a dear and holy task. The intensity of attention has all this time steadily been growing and is now painfully profound. Every eye is upon the hand of the Master.)

CHRISTUS *(taking the unleavened half-loaf which had been previously put aside)*. Now is the Son of man glorified and God is glorified in Him! *(solemnly)*. . . . A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another: even as I have loved you, that ye so love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye thus love one another.

(Solemnly blessing the bread by a grace, and then, with a gesture of slight violence, tearing the loaf in two at the word "broken.")

Take, eat, this is My body which is broken for you. Do this in remembrance of Me! *(He breaks the two halves into smaller fragments and passes these round the table. They all eat. After which the paschal meal is resumed, each partaking of the lamb, the bread, and the herbs, as did JUDAS.)*

THE DISCIPLES *(to each other)*. What is this new "remembrance," when this paschal feast is already a remembrance? What do His words portend?

JOHN. What is this new commandment that we love one another as He loved us? That were impossible.

PETER. What was that word, that we cannot come whither He goes?

(The meal is concluded. After supper "the third cup" is set before the Leader—"the cup of

blessing." Again the silence deepens, the attitude of the Leader again becomes significant, and the attention of all again becomes riveted upon Him.)

CHRISTUS (*taking the cup of blessing, and uttering the customary grace with uplifted eyes, with voice solemnly raised*). This cup is the new covenant in My blood which is shed for you and for many for the remission of sin: this do, as oft as ye shall drink it, in remembrance of Me. (*The cup is passed round.*)

CHRISTUS (*as they partake*). Verily I say unto you, I will no more drink of the fruit of the vine, until that day that I drink it new in the kingdom of God.

PETER (*as one unable to restrain himself further*). Lord, *whither* goest Thou?

CHRISTUS. Whither I go thou canst not follow Me now, but thou shalt follow Me afterward.

PETER. Lord, why cannot I follow Thee now? I will lay down my life for Thee.

CHRISTUS. All ye shall be offended because of Me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered. But after that I am risen, I will go before you into Galilee.

PETER. If *all* shall be offended in Thee, yet will not I.

CHRISTUS (*turning to him solemnly*). I tell thee, Peter, that this day, even in this night, before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice.

PETER (*with horror, exceedingly vehemently*). God in His heaven forbid! This be far from me! O my Master! This from Thee? To me? If I must die with Thee, I will not deny Thee.

ALL. Nor I . . . Nor I . . .

CHRISTUS (*silencing them with a quiet gesture*). Simon, Simon . . .

PETER (*to himself*). Not "Peter"!

CHRISTUS (*continuing*). Behold, Satan asked to have you all that he might sift you as wheat: but I made supplication for *thee* that *thy* faith fail not: and do thou, when once thou hast turned again, stablish thy brethren.

(*They desist, very heavy of countenance; PETER appears crushed.*)

CHRISTUS. Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know.

THOMAS (*gloomily*). Lord, we know not whither Thou goest; and how can we know the way?

CHRISTUS. I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me. If ye had known Me, ye should have known My Father also: and from henceforth ye know Him, and have seen Him.

PHILIP (*with great urgency*). Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us.

CHRISTUS. Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known Me, Philip? He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father? Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak unto you I speak not of Myself: but the Father that dwelleth in Me, He doeth the works. Believe Me that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me; or else believe Me for the very works' sake. Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on Me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto My Father. (*All are greatly astonished.*) If ye love Me ye will keep My

commandments, and I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him: but ye know Him, for He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world seeth Me no more; but ye see Me: because I live, ye shall live also. At that day ye shall know that I am in My Father, and ye in Me, and I in you. He that hath My commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me: and he that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him.

JUDE (*in a tone of uttermost amazement*). Lord, how is it that Thou wilt manifest Thyself unto us, *and not unto the world?*

CHRISTUS. If a man love Me, he will keep My words: and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make Our abodè with him. He that loveth Me not, keepeth not My sayings: and the word which ye hear is not Mine, but the Father's which sent Me. These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you. But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you. (*Beginning to rise, and stretching forth His hands to them:*) Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you. If ye loved Me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father: for My Father is greater than I. And now I have told you before it come to pass, that, when it is

come to pass, ye might believe. Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in Me. But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave Me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence! *(They rise and stand round the table.)*

A DISCIPLE. The hymn! The remainder of the Great Hallel.

(Psalms cxv.-cxviii. are sung, ending thus:)

I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord. The Lord hath chastened me sore: but He hath not given me over unto death. Open to me the gates of righteousness; I will go into them, and I will praise the Lord: the gate of the Lord, into which the righteous shall enter. I will praise Thee; for Thou hast heard me, and art become my salvation. The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner. This is the Lord's doing; it is marvellous in our eyes. This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it. Save now, I beseech Thee, O Lord: O Lord, I beseech Thee, send now prosperity. Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the Lord: we have blessed you out of the house of the Lord. God is the Lord, which hath showed us light: bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar.

CHRISTUS *(to Himself)*. Bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar. *(Aloud, as they begin to put on their shoes for departure:)* When I sent you forth without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye anything?

ALL. Nothing.

CHRISTUS. But now, he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip: and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one. For I say unto

you, that this that is written must yet be accomplished in Me, And He was reckoned amongst the transgressors: for the things concerning Me have an end.

PETER and JAMES. Lord, behold, here are two swords.
CHRISTUS (*with a sad smile*). Enough!

[*They pass out into the moonlit street, under the trellis of a vine, the green leaves of which are bright in the light of the full moon.*]

CHRISTUS (*as the voices of the departing band gradually die away*). I am the true Vine . . . and ye are the branches . . . (*Their footsteps die away. The room is left in complete silence, the remains of the feast dimly visible.*)

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A crashing knock at the front door is heard; it is burst open and a clash of armour and heavy trampling boots are heard on the stairs. Enter JUDAS with a crowd of temple-guards, under MALCHUS the servant of the Chief Priests, driving in MARK, who appears to have been roused from sleep; he is in his night garment.

JUDAS. Too late. The bird has flown.

MALCHUS (*savagely to MARK*). Whither has He gone, villain?

MARK (*trembling*). Nay, sir, I know not.

MALCHUS (*striking him in the face*). Liar!

JUDAS. Waste not your time, sir, over this weakling. I know well enough where they will have gone—and not long ago either. Every evening He resorts with His disciples to the little garden of the Oil Press in the Kedron ravine just outside the Sheep Gate. It is quiet there, and for a thousand pounds He will be there.

MALCHUS. He plays into our hands! At this late hour and in that unfrequented place we can lay hands on Him with ease.

JUDAS. Do not forget the signal. It will be dark. Whomsoever I *kiss*, it is He: take Him. Is that understood?

MALCHUS. Never fear. Guards! Away! Forth from this, and forward double-quick!

[Exeunt, MARK following trembling and distraught, clad as he is in linen night-garment. The full moon, emerging from clouds, illuminates the deserted table and the still, silent room].