

(Part 5)

'Why wilt thou not that I shall drink,' quoth he, 'of the cup that my Father hath given me?'

Christ had long before shewed his apostles that he must go to Jerusalem, and suffer much woe by the ancients and the scribes and the princes of the priests and in the end be slain and rise the third day again. And Peter, taking him aside, began to rebuke him in this wise: 'God forbid, master, it should so fare with thee, there shall no such thing come to thee.' Who turned about unto Peter and said: 'Get thee hence behind me, Satan, thou hast no taste in godly matters.'¹

Here lo! may ye see, how sharply Christ reproveth Peter, to whom a little before, when he confessed him to be the Son of God, he had said: 'Blessed art thou, Simon the son of John, for flesh and blood hath not revealed this to thee but my Father that is in heaven. And I say to thee that thou art a stone, and upon this stone shall I build my church, and hell gates shall not prevail against it. And unto thee will I give the keys of heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt bind upon earth, shall be bound likewise in heaven, and so forth.'²

And here he casteth him off in a manner, and maketh him go behind him, and plainly sheweth him that he hindereth him in his purpose, and calleth him Satan, and telleth him that he favoureth not godly things but all worldly.

But why did he all this? Mary, because he discourseled him to take this death upon him, which he then told him that needs must he suffer, and that by his own will it was resolutely so determined. And therefore would he that they should not only not let³ him therefrom, but also follow him by the same way themselves. 'For whoso will come after me,' saith he, 'must forsake himself, take up his cross, and follow me.'⁴

And besides all this he goeth forth further and declareth that if any man, when need requireth, will refuse to go to death with him, he shall not avoid bodily death thereby, but fall from that to a worse. And contrariwise whosoever will not stick to bestow his life for me, saith he, he shall not lose his life at all but change it for a better. 'For he that will save his life shall lose it, and he that will lose his life for my sake shall find it. And what good getteth a man, if he win the whole world and loseth his soul withal? Or what exchange will any man make for his soul? For the Son of Man shall come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then shall he reward every man according to his doings.'⁵

I tarry a little longer upon his place than peradventure needeth. But who is there, trow ye, that would not with these words of Christ, being so sore, so biting, and again so effectually putting us in hope of everlasting life, be moved somewhat to digress from his matter? Howbeit as concerning this present place, by these words of Christ we see well how severely Peter was here admonished to beware that he abused his zeal to the hindering of Christ's death no more.

And yet once again lo! as he then did all his possible endeavour by words to counsel him to the contrary, so now laboured he as fast by main force and violence upon the like zeal to defend him therefrom.

All this notwithstanding, Christ, because the fault that Peter did came of a good affection, and also inasmuch as going to his passion he demeaned himself in all points humbly, would not too sharply reprove him therefor, but first by reason corrected him, and after by telling him his fault, and at last declared also unto him that if he himself were not willing to die, little needed he to be defended either by him or any other man's aid at all, since his Father would not fail, if he would desire it of him, to send him at his need a mighty strong unvincible army of angels from heaven against those silly 'slaves that were come now to take him.

So first of all, as I told you, did Christ repress the fervent desire that Peter had to strike, and shewed him the reason why. 'What, wilt thou not,' quoth he, 'that I shall drink of the cup which my Father hath given me?

'All my life hitherto hath been a pattern of obedience and a sample of humility. Was there ever anything that I have either oftener or more earnestly taught ye, than to be obedient to your rulers, to honour your parents, to yield unto Caesar what belongeth unto him, and to God likewise whatsoever is due to him? And now that I am even at the last point of my business, and here shall make an end of all together, this godly wonderful work that I have been so long about, wouldst thou have me out of hand to mar it every whit, and refuse the cup that my Father thus offereth me, and so the Son of Man to be disobedient unto God his Father?'

After this told he Peter that he had done very evil to strike with the sword; and that declared he also by the example of the civil laws, who saith: 'Whoso taketh a sword, with the sword shall he be slain.'

For by the civil laws of the Romans, under which the Jews at the same time lived, whosoever without sufficient authority were spied so much as to have a sword about him to murder any man with, was in a manner in as evil case as he that had murdered one indeed. In how much more danger is he then that both draweth his sword and striketh with it too? And being so amazed and in such fear as Peter was, I cannot well believe he was so circumspect that of purpose he forbare to strike at Malchus's head, and only smote at his ear, because he minded not to kill him, but only to make him afraid.

Here if any man will perhaps say, that one may lawfully even with the sword save an innocent and good man from the violent hands of mischievous raging ruffians, the discussing of that matter would require a longer process than were convenient for this place. But certainly, though Peter's tender loving affection towards Christ caused his offence to be somewhat the more excusable, yet that he had no lawful authority to fight for him sufficiently appeareth by that Christ had before time so precisely warned him, that he should in no wise go about to hinder his death and passion, not so much as with one word, and less than with any kind of violence.

Besides this herewith daunted he Peter's hasty courage too, by shewing him plainly that of his defence he had no need at all.

'Weenest thou,' quoth he, 'that I cannot call unto my Father for help, and he will give me forthwith above twelve legions of angels?'

Of his own power here speaketh he but little, but of his Father's favour towards him, thereof doth he joyfully talk. For since he was going to his deathward, he would in no case greatly advance himself, nor for that while openly tell him that he was in equal power with his Father. But to have it appear that he needed to be holpen neither at Peter's hand, nor at none earthly creature's else, he shewed him that if he would but ask it, he should not fail to have, incontinent ready, sufficient assistance of angels, from his almighty Father in heaven. 'Why trowest thou,' quoth he, 'that I cannot make request unto my Father, and he will send me straightways more than twelve legions of angels?'

As though he would say: 'If this be not enough to make thee know that I have no need of thy help, that thou sawest me with thine own eyes by mine only word overthrow all this mighty band, and yet never touched them (against whom if thou wouldst reckon thyself able to defend me by thine own might and strength, thou wert stark mad and much to be lamented) yet at the leastwise call to thy remembrance eftsoons, whose son thou saidst I was, when I asked you all this question: Whom do you say that I am? And thou by and by inspired by God madest answer unto me again: Thou art Christ, the son of the living God. Then since thou knowest by his revelation that I am the Son of God, and seeing thou canst not be ignorant that every natural father will not fail to help his child, weenest thou that if I of mine own choice were not willing to die, my Father in heaven would not be ready to help me?'

'What, thinkest thou that if I would require it of him, I could not have more than twelve legions of angels, and that out of hand by and by without any further delay? Against so many legions of angels how should such a silly sort of vile slaves and wretches as they be, be able so much as to stand on their feet, when ten times twelve legions of such as they be could not endure to behold of one angel one angry look?'

After this fell Christ in hand with the first point again, as wherein chiefly consisted the effect of all the matter.

'How shall the scriptures be fulfilled then,' said he, 'since so must it needs be?'

The scriptures be full of prophecies concerning Christ's death, and full are they in like manner of the mysteries of his passion, and of mankind's redemption which could never have come to pass had he not so suffered.

Now lest Peter or any other at any time after might thus mutter secretly with himself: 'Sir, if thou canst, as thou sayest, obtain so many legions of thy Father, why dost thou not ask them?' To this he said: 'How shall then the scriptures be fulfilled, since it is behovable to be? Then seeing by the scriptures thou dost so well perceive that this is the only way determined by God's justice and wisdom to restore mankind again to the felicity he is fallen from, now if I should heartily desire my Father to preserve me from death, what should I thereby else do but labour mine own self to hinder the same thing which I came hither for. And therefore to call angels out of heaven to assist me, what were that but utterly to debar from heaven all mankind for ever, for whose redemption and restitution into the heavenly bliss is the special cause of my coming? So that now fightest thou with thy sword, not against the wicked Jews, but rather against all mankind, inasmuch as the scriptures thou wilt not suffer to be fulfilled, nor me to drink of the cup that my

Father hath given me, through which I being without spot and wem * might purge and cleanse the foul deformed spots of man's nature.'

But mark you here the marvellous mildness of Christ, which was not only content to stay Peter from striking, but also for our example to do good for evil, set hand to his persecutor's ear that was stricken off, and restored it whole again.

No creature living is there, I trow, in every part so replenished with soul and life, as the letter of holy writ is full of spiritual mysteries. For as we can touch no piece of the body but it hath soul therein which giveth life and sense thereto, be it never so small a portion, so in all scripture is there no history so gross, if I may so name it, or so base, but that it is quickened with some spiritual lively mystery. Wherefore in Malchus's ear which Peter's sword cut off and by Christ's holy hand set on again, we must not only consider the history (and yet thereby may we learn many a wholesome lesson too) but deeper must we look and view besides the ghostly fruitful meaning thereof privily contained under the literal sense.

Malchus then, which in the Hebrew tongue signifieth that we call in English a king, doth not without good convenience betoken * reason unto us. For reason in man ought to rule like a king, and so rule doth it indeed when submitting itself to the obedience of faith it serveth God, and him whoso serveth most ruleth like a king.

But this bishop with his priests, the Pharisees, the scribes, and the ancients of the people, that were wholly given to lewd superstitions which they had matched with the law of God, under pretence of holiness labouring to destroy all godly virtue and to rid out of the way the author of true religion, do well signify and represent unto us blasphemous archheretics with their complices, the teachers and ringleaders of devilish superstition.

Then as often as man's reasonable soul, rebelling against Christ's true faith, forsaketh Christ, and betaketh itself to heresies, it becometh from thenceforth that archheretic's bondslave, whose false errors by the devil's deceitful means it followeth. Such a one, lo! keepeth still his left ear to hear sinister heresies withal, but his right ear to hear the true faith withal, that hath he utterly lost.

Yet do not all men always this upon like meaning and intent, nor yet worketh it ever in every man like effect neither. For sometime of a mere set malice do some folk fall to heresies. These men's ears are not suddenly cut off at one stroke, but little and little in process of time, as the devil poureth in his poison upon them, do they rot and putrify. And after the festered parts are once congealed, then doth the hardness thereof so stop up all the ways that no goodness can after enter. These wretches, alas, are seldom or never perfectly made whole again, since these parts that the fretting * canker hath clearly eaten up are utterly perished for ever, so that nothing remaineth in them ever to be cured more.

And the ear that was upon an indiscrete zeal at one blow suddenly stricken off, and fell down to the ground, betokeneth such persons as being overcome with some sudden blind affection under the colour of truth are carried clean therefrom.

Some there are again whom their own good zeal deceiveth. Whereof Christ speaketh thus: 'The time shall come in which whoso slayeth thee, shall think he doth good service unto God.' "

A figure of this sort of folk was the apostle St. Paul.

Other are there beside which having their hearts cumbered with worldly affections, let their ears, being once cut off from hearing the celestial doctrine, lie there still upon the ground, whose miserable estate doth Christ full often pity. And the ears that were either through some hasty rash motion or unadvised zeal so smitten off from the head, with his own hand taketh he up from the ground, and with the same setteth them on fast again, and so maketh them meet to hear the true doctrine afresh.

I wot right well that the old fathers, as one found one thing and some other an other, have out of this one place by the gracious assistance of the Holy Ghost, gathered many and divers mysteries, all which purpose I not here to rehearse for overmuch discontinuing ^{is} the process of this story.

'And Jesus said to the princes of the priests, the officers of the temple, and the ancients that came unto him: Hither come ye with swords and glaives to take me like a thief, whereas I was daily in the temple among ye and sat and taught ye, and ye laid no hands upon me. But this is your hour and the power of darkness.'

These words said Christ unto the princes of the priests, the officers of the temple, and the ancients that came to take him. But hereupon riseth there among some men a certain doubt, for that the evangelist Luke telleth that Jesus spake these words to the chief priests, the officers of the temple, and the ancients of the people, whereas the other evangelists in such sort do recite the matter, that by their writing it appeareth they sent a band of soldiers and some of their servants thither, and came not themselves at all.

This doubt do some men assoil ^{is} in this wise: that Jesus in speaking these words to them whom they sent, spake it to themselves, as princes use to talk together by their ambassadors, and private persons commonly by their messengers. So whatsoever we say to the servants that is sent unto us, whereof he must again make report to him that sent him, that say we to his master himself.

Forsooth for my part, albeit I never a deal disallow this answer, yet can I better like their opinion which think that Christ spake these words to the princes of the priests, the officers of the temple, and the ancients of the people, presently face to face. For St. Luke saith not that Christ spake these words to all the princes of the priests, nor to all the officers of the temple, nor to all the ancients of the people, but to those of them only that were come to take him. Whereby he seemeth plainly to declare that although by them all assembled together in council, this company of soldiers and their own servants were sent in all their names to apprehend Christ, yet came there thither with them some of every sort beside, as well of the ancients, and Pharisees, as also of the princes of the priests. Which opinion thoroughly agreeth with the words of St. Luke, and may stand well enough with the sayings of all the other evangelists too. Wherefore Christ in speaking to the princes of the priests, the Pharisees, and the ancients of the people, gave them a privy warning that they should not ascribe the taking of him at that time to their own power or policy, nor peevishly glory, like folk that unhappily have good hap to do evil, as though they had wilyly and craftily compassed their matter, since none of all their fond contrived devices, whereby they endeavoured to suppress the truth, could never against him have any thing prevailed; but God's high wisdom had provided and appointed the time in which the prince of

this world, the devil, should, ere he were ware, righteously lose man-kind, his guilefully gotten prey, even while he most laboured unrighteously to keep it.

Christ did also expressly tell them that little need had they to have hired the traitor, or to come thither with lanterns and torches by night, or so many of them together with such a band of soldiers to set upon him with swords and glaives, seeing they might without their cost and charge, without any labour, without any breaking of their sleep, and without any weapon at all, easily oftentimes have taken him, while he sat teaching openly in the temple among them. And if they would boldly brag with themselves that they had circumspectly ordered their doings, and furthermore say that though Christ called it a thing easy to be done, yet was it indeed very hard and cumbrous, and such as could never have been brought to pass without much danger of some tumult and uproar of the people, how dangerous a matter that was to do of late right well appeared at the raising of Lazarus. For they had had experience oftener than once that, as well as the multitude loved Christ, and as much as they esteemed him for his wonderful goodness, those for all that that went about to take him and kill him, were so little afraid of sustaining any harm at their hands therefor, that had he not escaped through the midst of them by his own almighty power, they might see good likelihood that in their mischief the people would have taken their parts. So unconstant is the common people, and so soon inclined to evil.

And to conclude, how little any man should regard the common people's favour, or contrariwise dread their displeasure, that that followed soon after well declared, where, as soon as Christ was once apprehended, they cried no faster before: 'Blessed is he that cometh in the name of our Lord,' and 'Hosanna in the highest,' ¹⁴ than now in a fury they cried out clean contrary: 'Away, away with him and crucify him.' ¹⁵

Whereby it is evident that it came of God himself that, until that time, those which would so fain have taken him cast perils where were none at all, and causeless quaked for fear where need was none to fear. But now as soon as the convenient time was come that by the painful death of one man, all men should be redeemed to the joyful bliss of the life everlasting, as many as unfeignedly desired it, these peevish wretched dolts thought that they by their wily wits had wilyly wrought that thing which the providence of almighty God, with-out whose foreknowledge not so much as a sparrow lighteth on the ground, had of his great mercy from before all time determined.

Wherein to shew how far they were deceived, and to teach them moreover that neither the traitor's guile, nor their own craftily contrived trains, ¹⁶ nor all the might the Roman soldiers had, could have stood them in any stead, had he not been willing thereto himself, Christ said unto them: 'But this is your hour, and the power of darkness.' Which words of his doth the evangelist St. Matthew with a strong reason enforce: 'And all this,' saith he, 'was done to accomplish that the prophets had written.'

All the prophets everywhere be full of prophecies concerning Christ's death. As where it is thus: 'To death was he carried like a lamb, and of him in the streets was there heard no cry. In my hands and my feet made they deep holes. These wounds have I in the house of those that loved me. He was accounted in the number of wicked men; our diseases did he verily bear; and by his smart were we healed. Through the sinfulness of my people was he carried to his death.' ¹⁷

The prophets in many places plainly foreshew Christ's death and passion, whose prophecies, seeing they could not but be fulfilled, it consequently followeth that the matter depended not upon man's determination, but rather that he who from before all time foresaw it and precisely determined so to have it (the Father I mean of Christ, and Christ himself likewise, and the Holy Spirit of them both, which three so always work together that nothing is there done in any creature by any one of them, but it is done equally by them all three) both foreknew and appointed the time that was most meet for the accomplishment thereof.

Now when these bishops and princes of the priests, the scribes, the Pharisees, and the ancients of the people, and to make short tale, all these execrable and devilish officers, so greatly gloried in themselves for their high devices because they had taken Christ so craftily, nought else therewhiles did these mad fellows, blinded with malice, but much to their own harm and to other folks singular commodity, unwares and unwittingly busily help to achieve the blessed and resolute pleasure of almighty God (and yet not the Father's and the Holy Ghost's alone, but Christ's own will too) in procuring Christ a very short death, and mankind a blessed life in heaven, and Christ for the same honour and glory for ever.

Then said Christ unto them: *'But this is your hour, and the power of darkness.'*

'Whereas heretofore ye hated me deadly, and therefore gladly would have despatched me, and might with much less business easily have done it, had not the power of God restrained you from it, yet all that while in the temple neither did you take me nor once made offer to lay any hand upon me. And why so, trow ye? Forsooth because the time and hour was not yet come which my Father of his unsearchable wisdom had by mine own consent appointed, and not any constellation of the planets, nor your subtle conveyances neither. And will ye know when? Not since Abraham's days, but from before the beginning of the world, since from before all time, ere ever Abraham was made, am I with the Father. This is therefore your hour and the power of darkness, this is the short while that is granted ye, and the liberty given unto darkness, that now ye may in the night which till this hour ye could never be suffered to bring to pass in the day, like monstrous ravening fowls, like screech-owls and hags, like bats, owlets, night crows, and birds of the helly lake, go about with your bills, your talons, your teeth, and your shrill shrieking outrageously, but all in vain, thus in the dark to flee upon me.

'In darkness be ye, while ye ascribe my death to your own strength, and in darkness shall be your president Pilate too, as long as he shall proudly boast that he hath authority either to quit me or crucify me, who albeit mine own countrymen and bishops shall deliver me into his hands, should have no power for all that upon me, were it not given him from my Father above. And for that cause the more is their offence that shall betake me unto him. But this is your hour and the short power of darkness. And he that walketh in darkness wotteth not whither he goeth.

'So do ye neither see nor know what ye do. There-fore will I pray myself for ye that you may have pardon for that you work against me. Yet pardon shall ye not all attain, nor blind ignorance will not excuse you all neither, since you are the very cause of your ignorance yourselves. Ye put away the light yourselves, ye first pluck out both your own eyes yourselves, and after that other men's too, so that the blind leadeth the blind, till ye both fall into the pit.

‘This is your short hour; this is the unreasonable and unruly power of darkness which now causeth you with weapon to take me, thus weaponless as I am; that is to say, cruel caitiffs a meek lamb, sinful persons a sinless innocent, the traitor his master, vile wretches their God. And as well as ye have power upon me now, so shall upon my disciples other provosts and emperors after me, some upon one and some upon another, have a like hour and short power of darkness. And verily the power of darkness may I right well call it. For like as whatsoever my disciples shall suffer or say, they shall neither by their own strength suffer it, nor of themselves speak it, but by my strength valiantly vanquishing all pain, through their patient sufferance save their own souls, and the Spirit of my Father shall speak in them, so they that shall persecute them and put them to death shall neither do nor say anything of themselves, but the prince of darkness who is already come and hath no power on me, as he may covertly convey his venomous poison into those tyrants and tormentors' hearts, so will he for the short while he shall be thereto licenced, utter and practise his might and power by them.

‘And therefore must the soldiers that go in warfare with me not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the princes and potentates, against the worldly governors of these dark regions, and against the wicked spirits in the air. [»] So shall Nero start up, by whom shall the prince of darkness slay Peter, and besides him another not as yet named Paul, who is still sore bent against me. In like manner shall other emperors and their lieutenants deal with other disciples of my flock by the said prince of darkness. But when the gentiles have fretted their fill, and the Jews devised their vain devices, when the kings of the earth have stood together, and the princes assembled against their lord, and against his anointed, labouring to break his bonds, and to cast from them that most sweet yolk, that God of his goodness by his bishops shall lay on their stiff necks, then shall God that dwelleth in heaven laugh them to scorn, and our Lord make them a mow. [»] Who sitteth not as the earthly princes do in a gorgeous chariot a little above the ground, but stieth [»] up above the west, and sitteth above cherubim, whose seat is heaven, and whose footstool is the earth, our Lord is his name. He is king of kings and lord of lords; a dreadful king which taketh away the spirit of princes. This prince in his wrath shall speak unto them, and in his fury shall he trouble them. His Son, which is his anointed, whom he hath begotten this day, he will make king over Sion his holy hill, the hill I say that shall never be moved. And all his enemies shall he cast down to be as a footstool under his feet. Such as did there endeavour to break his bonds, and to shake his yoke from them, those shall he, spite of their teeth, [»] rule with an iron rod, and as a brittle earthen pot in pieces all to crush [»] them.

‘Against them all, and against the prince of darkness that setteth them on, shall my disciples be comforted and strengthened in our Lord. And having the armour of God on their backs, and their loins girt with the truth, and their bodies fenced with justice, and their feet shod to be in a readiness for the gospel of peace, and in all things taking unto them the pavice [»] of faith, and putting upon them the helmet of health, and the sword of the spirit which is the Word of God, they shall receive strength from above, and therewith stand stiff against the devils' trains, the fair flattering speech, I mean, which he shall utter by the mouths of their persecutors, and all to allure them by flattery from the truth. And in the day of trouble shall they mightily withstand all the open assaults of Satan the devil, and on every side environed with the pavice of faith, by their bitter tears bursting out in their prayers, and their red blood gushing out in the agony of their painful passion, they shall clearly quench and put out all the fiery darts of the cursed spirit by his

ministers cast violently against them. And so my blessed martyrs, following me with their cross upon them, after their victory obtained against the devil, the prince of darkness, and all his earthly ministers and soldiers thrown down under their feet, shall with great triumph be carried up aloft, and with wonderful solemnity enter into heaven. ²⁴

‘But ye on the other side that now extend your malice upon me, and the devilish generation that shall follow your malicious example, and those adders' brood which will with the like malice without repentance extremely persecute my disciples hereafter, shall with perpetual shame be driven down deep into the dark flaming fire of hell. Howbeit, now for the while are ye at liberty to use and practise your power as ye list, whereof yet, because you shall not bear yourselves too bold, remember hardly how shortly it shall end, since this world that you have to work your wicked wills in shall not always endure. But for mine elects' sake, that they shall not be tempted above that they may bear, the time is much abridged, and shall last but as it were a very short hour, so that long shall not this hour of yours be, nor the power of darkness long endure neither, as that that only hath but the time present, which present time is evermore the shortest, since lost hath it the time past already, and the time to come hath it not yet attained. Go to, therefore, since so short is your hour, lose no part thereof, but lewdly bestow it as you have begun. And for that you seek to destroy me, what ye mind to do, come off and do it quickly, take me out of hand, but yet let these my disciples depart.’

HOW HIS DISCIPLES FORSOOK HIM.

‘Then all his disciples departed from him, and left him there alone.’

By this place, lo! may a man perceive how hard and painful a thing the virtue of patience is. For many men are there very well willing even stoutly to die, how sure so ever they be thereof, so they may give stroke for stroke and wound for wound, thereby to have some part of their will fulfilled. But Mary, where all comfort of revenging is gone, there to take death so patiently as neither to strike again, nor for a stripe to yield so much as an angry word, this must I needs confess to be so sovereign a point of patience, that as yet were not the apostles themselves so strong as to be able to climb so high. Who having it fresh in their remembrance, how boldly they had promised rather to be killed with Christ than once to shrink from him, did abide at the least wise so far forth by the same, that if he would have licenced them to fight and die manfully, they shewed themselves all very ready to have died for him. Which thing Peter well declared too indeed, by that he began to practise upon Malchus. But after that our saviour would neither suffer them to fight, nor to make any manner resistance, then left they him all alone, and fled away every one.

Albeit I have been ere this in some doubt with myself, when Christ rose from his prayers to see his apostles and found them asleep, whether he went to them all in two sundry places as they were severed, or to those only whom he had taken with him somewhat aloof from the rest and placed nearest unto him, yet when I consider here these words of the evangelist that they all forsook him and ran away, I can now no more doubt, but that he went to them all and found them all asleep. ²⁵ For whereas they should have warily watched, as Christ had so often warned them, and prayed also, for fear of falling into temptation, they through their sleeping gave the devil occasion, while their minds were wavering and careless, to make them more inclined to fight or to flee, than to be content to take all things with patience. Whereupon at length they left him all

alone, and got them clearly from him. Whereby were verified both this saying of our saviour Christ: 'This night shall ye all have occasion in me to fall,'²⁶ and this prophecy likewise: 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered abroad.'²⁷

'And after Christ went there a young man, his body all bare save only for a linen sheet that was cast about him, which he left behind him, and all naked fled away from them.'

What this young man was, it is not perfectly known. Some think it was St. James that was called our Lord's brother and surnamed Justus. Some other again reckoned it was St. John the evangelist, whom our Lord ever above the rest of his apostles singularly favoured, who was as yet but young, as appeared by that he lived so many years after Christ's death. For as testifieth St. Jerome, he died in the threescore and eighth year after Christ's passion.

Yet are there of the old writers that say that this young man was none of the apostles, but a servant of that house where Christ kept his maundy that night. Whose mind in that behalf am I most moved to follow. For besides that myself thinketh it nothing likely that an apostle would have none other apparel to cover his body with but a bare linen sheet, namely so loose about him that he might lightly cast it from him, to be of this opinion leadeth me also both the process of the history, and the very words of him that wrote the same. And among them that reckon that he was one of the apostles, the most part think it was St. John. But the self-same St. John's own words here following maketh me think that opinion to have small likelihood to be true, where he writeth thus:

'And after Jesus went Simon Peter and another disciple. And that disciple was well known to the bishop, and with Jesus he entered into the bishop's hall. And Peter stood at the door without. Then forth went the other disciple that was well known to the bishop, and spake to the maid that kept the door and let Peter in.'

They that write that it was St. John the evangelist that followed Christ and escaped away when he was like to have been taken, do somewhat stagger hereat, that he should cast off his linen sheet and naked flee away from them. Which point as it seemed could not well stand with those things that forthwith ensued, as that he entered into the bishop's hall and let in Peter (for all men agree that that was the evangelist) and so never left him till he came to the place where he was crucified, and finally all the while he hung on the cross, stood by him with his most dearly beloved mother, one pure virgin with another, and at his recommendation took her from thenceforth as his own. And without question in all this while and in all these places had he ever more clothes upon him, as he that was one of Christ's disciples and none of that shameless sect of cynics. And therefore though his wisdom served him well to know that he should not stick to have his body seen all naked where need or necessity required it, yet without any cause of his own choice so to go abroad in open sight naked, the maidenly shamefastness that he had in him would not, I ween, suffer him so to do.

Now to avoid this inconvenience they say that he went into some corner in the meanwhile and apparelled himself afresh, upon which point though I purpose not presently to keep any dispicions,²⁸ yet is it not, as meseemeth, anything likely so to be, specially since I do here so well see that he and Peter still followed, and with Jesus entered into the house of Annas, who was father-in-law to the bishop Caiphas. Again doth this much move me to be of their mind which supposed that this young man was none of the apostles, but some servant of the house where

Christ was at his maundy, that the evangelist St. Mark doth in one self place shew, both that the apostles fled away and that yet this young man tarried still behind, where he writeth after this sort

'Then his disciples forsaking him, fled away everyone. But a certain young man followed him still.'

Lo! here he sayeth that the apostles fled: he saith not that some of them fled, but that they fled all. And that one tarried behind and came after Christ, not of his apostles, for gone already were they every one, but a certain young man, and as it should seem some stranger whose name either he knew not, or else thought it vain to rehearse. So that this young man, in mine opinion, partly upon the report he had heard of Christ before, and partly for that he presently saw in him as he served him at the table where he sat with his disciples, first by the secret working of the Holy Ghost conceived a fervent affection towards him, and afterwards of his own mere devotion, when Christ after his supper departed and went his way, he followed him, though somewhat aloof from the apostles perchance, yet still in company with them, and sat down with them and rose with them, and at last stepped in amongst them when these wretched caitiffs suddenly came upon him to take him. After this, whereas all the apostles every one for fear fled away while the soldiers were amazed and took little heed unto them, this young man as he that wist well that what love he bear to Christ was yet to no man known, was yet so much bolder still to abide thereby.

But Lord, how hard a matter is it to love and not to disclose it. This young man for all he was amongst the thickest of them that mortally maligned Christ, yet by his pace and other his demeanour so betrayed he himself that they all might well perceive that he, when all the rest had forsaken him, thus followed Christ still, not to hurt him but meaning to do him service. Whereupon they espying at length that all the remnant of Christ's company were fled away, upon this young man in a great fury began to take hold, whom they saw all alone so boldly following him.

Which thing maketh me verily believe that they no less meant than to have served all the apostles in like sort, had they not while they were thus amazed suddenly escaped from them, so that thereby did that take place that Christ had by way of commandment said unto them before: 'Let these my disciples depart.' Which saying Christ's pleasure was should chiefly serve for his specially chosen apostles, and yet not for them only, but, the more bounteously to extend his liberal goodness, he would it should serve for this young man beside, which being not called into the blessed fellowship of his apostles, of his own accord followed them, and privily wound in among them. By means whereof did Christ both better declare his own unknown power, and the more opened the feebleness of this lewd rabble, which not only of oversight let go his eleven apostles whom they would have been loath should so have escaped them, but also, as many as they were, were not all able to keep one poor silly ²⁹ young man whom they had in their hold already and, as far forth as I can conjecture, with their own company closed in round about. For as fast as they held him, quickly cast he off his shirt and ran away naked from them.

And verily I put no doubts at all, but that like as he followed Christ that night and could not be pulled from him, but last of all, when all his apostles were fled and gone, and not then neither until they had with great extremity and force taken hold of him, so as soon as he had opportunity

he returned into Christ's flock afresh, and now liveth with Christ in everlasting bliss, where I pray God we may, and I trust in God we shall, once live with him, and then what he was shall we learn of him, and divers other things done that night which be not contained in writing shall we to our inestimable comfort much more perfectly know.

But in the mean season, to make ourselves the surer and easier passage thither, it shall stand us in no little stead, if we by this fleeing of the apostles before they were taken, and this young man's escaping after he was taken, will pick out some wholesome advertisements for our soul's behoof by the way to carry in our journey with us for the better achieving of the same. For the ancient fathers of the Church give us counsel to beware that none of us, upon overmuch confidence of our own strength, should willingly without discretion bring our-selves in danger haply to displease God. And therefore, if any man misfortune to come in such place, where he perceiveth he shall be in hazard to be forced to offend God, there would I advise him to do as the apostles did here, which before they were taken speedily got them their way.

Howbeit by this it is not meant that the apostles are to be commended for their fleeing. Which though Christ of his infinite mercy permitted them for their frailty to do, yet did he nothing praise it at all, but foretold them that the self-same night it should be an occasion for them to fall. But if we feel ourselves anything feeble and faint-hearted, then may we all so far forth follow their example and flee, as we may thereby without sin avoid the peril of further mischief. Otherwise if a man shrink away when God giveth him to abide still by it (either for his own wealth, or for theirs whom he seeth he hath cure and charge of) and boldly to trust in him, this man if he chance not to do it for saving his temporal life, ^{or} rather, to say the truth, if he do it to save his life here, this man playeth the stark fool indeed. For what greater folly can there be devised, than to set more by the short wretched time of this life than by the everlasting bliss in heaven?

But if he so do to win himself endless wealth to come, as if he hap to void ^{or} for fear he might be enforced to offend God, herein doth he both very lewdly and foolishly too, since it is always accounted an heinous crime to foresake a man's master. And he that so forsaketh him that he utterly despaireth of his help, is as evil as he that runneth from his master to his mortal enemy. And what worse thing can there be imagined than upon despair of God's gracious assistance to flee and give over to his foe that place in the field which God hath himself appointed thee to keep? Again, what madness is this, for fear thou mightest mishap to displease God by tarrying, by fleeing without all peradventure deadly to offend him. Mary, when thou mayest flee and God therewith not displeaseth, then without fail better is it for thee to be going betimes than tarrying till thou be caught to fall in danger of an outrageous offence. An easy matter is it and, so be it not against God's will, a very sure also, to haste thee away in time, where on the other side to stand still by it and fight, both hard is it and dangerous.

But yet of truth this young man's example teacheth us what manner of men they be that may longest and most safely abide, and if they fortune to be taken, shall best be able to break loose out of their takers' hands again. For the said young man albeit he abode last of all, and never departed from Christ till he was laid hands on and caught, yet because he had not many clothes upon him, but only a bare plain linen sheet, and that neither surely sewed upon him, nor fast girded about him, but slightly cast on his bare body at adventure so that he might easily shake it

off again, this young man I say suddenly threw it from him, and leaving it behind him in their hands that caught him, ran away from them naked, and as a man might say left them the shells to pledge, and took himself the kernel.

And what betokeneth this unto us? What else, trow you, but that likewise as a great gorbellied glutton, so corpulent and fat that he can scantly go, or he that is over-pestered with many clothes, is nothing fit or handsome to run apace, so when any dangerous persecution beginneth to draw near, hardly shall that person flee and save himself therefrom, that hath many bags of riches hanging round about him. No, nor very fast will he run neither, which how little soever he hath on his back, is yet so hard and straight girt therein, that uneth ³² can he draw his breath. For better shall he flee that hath many garments and can soon shake them off than he that, having few, hath them yet so surely fastened about his neck that, go whithersoever he will, needs must he carry them with him.

We see it happeth otherwhiles, but not so oft as I would wish we did, howbeit, lauded be God, we see it so sometime, that great, rich and substantial men are content rather to forgo all that ever they have in this world at once, than with God's displeasure sinfully to reserve any one penny thereof. These folk now although they have many clothes upon them, yet because they be not so strait girt unto them, as soon as present peril causeth them for to flee, do easily cast them off and safely escape away.

Contrariwise some do we see, and of those far more than I would there were, which having but few clothes and very little substance, have nevertheless so fastened their affection to that base beggarly baggage, that sooner would they be contented to have their skin plucked from their backs than be bereaved of such beggarly trash. Such a one had need to get him away betimes. For if he be once caught by his clothes and thereby once in hand, rather will he die for it than leave his sheet behind him. And to be brief, by the example of this young man are we taught, for fear of tribulation that may suddenly fall upon us, and danger that unawares may grow towards us, in case we should have occasion to flee, ever more to be in a readiness, and neither to be so overcharged with many clothes, nor again so fast buckled in one neither, but that as soon as necessity shall force us, we may cast off our light linen sheet, and naked escape away.

Now who so list to look a little further may see here set forth for him to learn, by this young man's deed, another lesson beside of much more force and efficacy as that the body is like a garment to the soul, which the soul putteth on when it first entereth into the world, and when by death it departeth hence, casteth off again. Wherefore the soul is so much more to be esteemed than the body, as the body is more excellent than the garment that it weareth. And as mad a part were it for a man to lose his soul for the saving of his body, as if some frantic fool would rather have his body spilled ³³ than depart ³⁴ with his pilled ³⁵ cloak. For of the body in this wise speaketh Christ: 'Is not the body more worth than the garment?' ³⁶ But mark you how highly he prizeth the soul: 'Why, what art thou the better,' saith he, 'if thou shouldst win the whole world and sustain the loss of thy soul? Or what exchange will any man make for his soul?' ³⁷ And I say unto you my friends: Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and when that is done are able to do no more. But I will tell you whom you ought to fear. Fear him that after he hath killed the body hath power to cast it into the fire of hell beside. So I say unto you: Fear him.' ³⁸

Thus doth the history of this young man put us in remembrance what state our body (which is but, as it were, the garment of our soul) should be in against the coming of such extreme storms, as that it be not pampered up with over-fat feeding, and sensually addicted to foul fleshly lusts, but by means of abstinence consuming all loathsome grossness be made as light as a fine linen sheet. And also that we should not so fasten our affection thereunto, but that we could in God's cause be right glad to forgo it. This lesson learn we, lo! of this young man here, who being in wretched caitiffs' hands, rather than he would be compelled anything to do or say that should sound to Christ's dishonour, left his sheet behind him and fled away naked from them.

A like part unto this young man here played there a great while ago another young man before, the holy and innocent patriarch Joseph I mean, a notable precedent to all that should come after, that as ware should they be in eschewing the danger of incestuous adultery, as they would to avoid the peril of their life. Upon this young Joseph, for that he was of personage comely and amiable to behold, whom Putiphar of his bond-slave had made high steward of his house, was Putiphar's wife by casting her eye upon him so sore enamoured, and incensed with her outrageous sensual lust waxed at length so frantic that, forcing ³⁹ for no shame both in words and countenance, undesired offered she herself unto him, and as unwilling as she found him, never ceased by sundry means to allure him. Yea, and when he plainly refused her offer, laid she hands on him, and caught him fast by his cloak, and so would this woman (Oh! What dishonesty was this!) by force have ravished this man. Who being better content to die than to commit so horrible an act, and knowing therewith how jeopardous it would be for him to stand still by it and abide the brunt, where present matter of carnal temptation was ministered unto him, and that the surest remedy for a man to master his sensuality was for to flee away, left his cloak in that beastly woman's hands and making haste away, soon got him out of doors. ⁴⁰

Howbeit, as I was about to tell ye, it is not our cloak, gown, coat, or any other like apparel of our body which we must be content only to cast from us, rather than we would do any deadly sin, but our own body too, which is but the garment or vesture of our soul, in that respect ought we to forsake. For if we labour, with God's displeasure, sinfully to save it, then do we both lose it and our soul also. But if for God's sake we can find in our hearts patiently to bear the loss thereof, and likewise as an adder so long rubbeth his old withered skin (which, I trow, is called in Latin *senecta*) among thorns and briars till at last he cast it quite away, and so leaving it in the hedge cometh forth fresh and young again, so if we, according to Christ's counsel, become wise as serpents, ⁴¹ and rubbing off this old rivelled ⁴² body of ours as the adder doth his skin, among the thorns of tribulation for the love of God, leave it behind us in the world, we shall therewith become fresh and young again, and so be shortly carried up into heaven, where we shall never wax old after.

OF THE TAKING OF CHRIST

'Then came they to Jesus and laid hands upon him, and Pilate's soldiers and their captain and the Jews' servants took hold of Jesus. And when they had him fast they bound him and brought him first unto Annas who was father-in-law to Caiphas. And Caiphas was he which had given counsel to the Jews that it was expedient one man should die for the people. And all the priests, the scribes, the Pharisees, and the ancients assembled together.'

What time they first laid hands upon Christ, therein be the writers of divers opinions. For by occasion of the evangelists' words agreeing all well enough upon the matter, but differing only in the manner of the rehearsal thereof (for one of them beginneth to tell first that that was later done, and another afterward bringeth in that that the other made no mention of at all), the interpreters of the same, not denying that to be true that any of the evangelists writeth, every one of them hath a sundry conjecture by himself, finding yet no fault with any that holdeth the contrary. For St. Matthew and St. Mark rehearse the process of his taking in such order that a man would think that, as soon as Judas had kissed Jesus, they laid hands upon him straight. Which conjecture both divers other right famous doctors of the Church, and also the excellent learned clerk Master John Gerson in his work entitled *Monatessaron* (which work of his, so far forth as concerneth the order of Christ's passion, I have at this present specially taken upon me to follow) not only liketh and alloweth, but himself also in the framing together of the whole history of the passion plainly followeth the same. Nevertheless in this one thing varying from his opinion, I have deemed it better to be of their mind, which are right notable writers too, that upon very probable reasons, gathered of the words of St. Luke and St. John the evangelists, do suppose that after Judas had kissed our Lord and was returned back to the soldiers and the Jews again, and after they were all, with the only words of Christ, stricken down flat to the ground, and after the chief priest's servant ('s) ear was cut off, and made whole by Christ afresh, and after he had rebuked Peter for his fighting, and stayed the rest of the apostles for (?from) making any resistance, and after he had once more spoken to the officer(s) of the Jews that were then present with him, and shewed them that they might now at their pleasure take him, which erst ⁴ they could never have done, and after all the apostles were fled away, and finally after the young man whom they were not able to keep (as sure hold as they had of him) was escaped stoutly, naked as he was, from them, that then, after all this, did they first lay hands upon Jesus.

Sir Thomas More wrote no more of this work, for when he had written this far, he was in prison kept so strait, that all his books and pen and ink and paper was taken from him, and soon after was he put to death. ⁴

From *St. Thomas More's History of the Passion*, Ed. P. E. Hallett, Trans. Mary Bassett. London: Burns Oates & Washbourne Ltd, 1941, pp. 105-134.

¹ Matt. xvi, 22, 23.

² *ibid.*, v, 17.

³ hinder.

⁴ Luke ix, 23.

⁵ Matt. xvi, 25.

⁶ miserable.

⁷ needful.

⁸ blemish.

⁹ i.e. suitably represents.

¹⁰ gnawing.

¹¹ John xvi, 2.

¹² i.e. because they would too much interrupt.

¹³ solve.

¹⁴ Matt. xxi, 9.

¹⁵ John xix, 15.

¹⁶ stratagems.

¹⁷ Isai. Liii, *passim* ; Ps. xxi, 17; Zach. xiii, 6.

¹⁸ Eph. vi, 12.

¹⁹ Ps. ii, 4, a grimace of derision.

²⁰ ascendeth.

²¹ despite themselves.

²² crush.

²³ shield.

²⁴ All this long passage is a mosaic of scriptural phrases.

²⁵ A marginal note runs as follows: 'I have not translated this place as the Latin copy goeth, but as I judge it should be, because my grandfather's copy was for lack of leisure never well corrected.'

The Latin words are : *Nihil dubito quin omnes fugerint qui dormierunt* : 'I do not doubt that all those who had slept now fled away.' As Mrs. Basset saw, this was not the point at issue, but whether Christ at this moment went to one group of the apostles only, or to both groups.

²⁶ Matt. xxvi, 31.

²⁷ Another marginal note occurs at this point: 'This prophecy "I will strike the shepherd, etc." was not written in my grand-father's copy, and therefore I do guess that this or some other like he would himself have written.' The Latin edition of Louvain, 1566, has : *Percutiam pastores et dispergentur oves gregis*. Probably Rastell, who had adopted Mrs. Basset's suggestion in this edition of 1557, prepared the matter also for the Louvain edition and added the Latin text at this point. The words come from Zach. xiii, 7, but they are quoted by St. Matthew, l.c.

²⁸ to dispute.

²⁹ weak.

³⁰ i.e. this man, unless perhaps he does it to save his life, or rather, even if he does it to save his life, etc.

³¹ flee.

³² only with difficulty.

³³ killed.

³⁴ part.

³⁵ plundered.

³⁶ Matt. vi, 25 .

³⁷ Matt. xvi, 26.

³⁸ Luke xii, 4.

³⁹ caring.

⁴⁰ Gen. xxxix.

⁴⁰

⁴¹ Matt. x, 16.

⁴² wrinkled.

⁴³ before.

⁴⁴ There is a similar notice at the end of the Latin text in the Louvain edition, which adds, however, the place and date of More's death.