

Dominus Illuminatio Mea.

No. 1.

It has been well said by Dean Church that the spiritual life must be nourished upon ideas not merely kindled by the emotions. When we feel dead and indifferent we are not intended to work ourselves up to a condition of greater fervour; what we want is a new *idea* of the spiritual life which will act upon that life as does a meal upon a sinking frame. We are to be transformed by the *renewing of our minds*, and with the renewed vigour given by new thoughts of God we are enabled once more for the spiritual activities of prayer, praise, and godly endeavour. In our Sunday talks we seek for the nutriment of new ideas, and we look for them in one or another of the Gospels, as these afford the most abundant supply of that of which we are in search. Our time is so short that we do not attempt a critical study, but just examine a given passage with a view to those sustaining ideas of the divine life which it may offer. But we take each Gospel as it comes, believing that the teaching is consecutive and that we can no more nourish our souls upon texts selected here and there than we can sustain our bodily or our intellectual life upon scraps. It is told that Mr. Romanes once asked Darwin to advise him as to the best course to take in the pursuit of science. The answer of the elder scientist was, "meditate." If meditation be the secret of success in the scientific, how much more must it be so in the spiritual life. This law of progress was better understood in the earlier Church than it is by ourselves. In the active duties of the Christian life we are apt to lose sight of the importance of meditation. Indeed, this spiritual process is analagous [sic] to that of digestion. It is not what we read or what we hear that sustains us, but what we appropriate; what we take home to our minds and ruminate upon,—reading a passage over and over, or dwelling, again and again, upon a thought, rejoicing in a "fresh thought of God" as a thing to be thankful for, a quickening influence to make us alive and active when a palsy of deadness and staleness appears to be creeping over us. We all have a spiritual life to sustain and we all need the periodic nourishment of new, or newly put, thoughts of God. We do not always sufficiently recognise how our Church has provided for this need in the weekly portion set before us in Collect, Epistle, and Gospel. In these we find, year by year, new thoughts and new teachings unfolding themselves whereby we might well advance to the stature of the perfect man. But our tendency is to grind at one idea until we are worn out with futile efforts and disappointment in ourselves. It is well not to expect too much of ourselves. Not to be good nor to be happy is the chief thing, but to know, to possess the knowledge of God—"For this is life eternal to know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent." We are about to begin the study of St. John's Gospel from this point of view, and it has seemed necessary to explain to those who join us to-day for the first time the object of our Sunday talks. This last of the Gospels is the final revelation of Christ, the word, so to speak, which comes to us from one who *knew*; for insight, comprehension, is the privilege of love, and none of the Twelve was so prepared for the fullest inspirations of the Holy Spirit ("Who" says "our Lord shall testify of Me") as that disciple whom Jesus loved, and who gave the one most welcome return for love—St. John understood his Master.

In reading this Gospel we all feel that we are drinking at the fountain-head of the knowledge of Christ; and from another point of view, the fourth Gospel is singularly comforting and strengthening to us who live in times of much perplexity. The Church has passed through the days when first St. Peter and, later, St. Paul had the teaching to offer specially suited to her needs. Perhaps for the present distress S. John the Divine is the appointed minister. This may be partly due to the fact that the age in which the last Gospel was written was an age of perplexed thought and anxious questionings not unlike our own. S. John is supposed to have written after the fall of Jerusalem, at the close of the first century, when the writer was a very aged man, able to bring from his treasury things new and old. In all probability the Gospel was written at Ephesus and was immediately called for by the state of things in the Christian Church generally, but especially in that great sea-port town of Asia Minor, a centre of various life, intellectual and commercial. "I am of Philo," "I am of Plato," "I am of Moses," "I am of Christ," men would say, each believing that he held the whole truth; and earnest souls would vex themselves about the differences between Christian and Platonic teaching, then, as they do to-day, about the disparities between the revelation of Scripture and that other revelation of Science which no man is yet able to reconcile.

The aged apostle saw the world about him troubled with many unanswerable questions. Then, as now, many of the best and noblest were not greatly concerned about personal success or failure, but chafed against such problems as—the whence and whither of men—the meaning of suffering—the mystery of pain—the purpose of life—the limit of responsibility—the origin of all things. Some of us to-day see in one divine Person the solution of every problem; some, as in *Natural Law in the Spiritual World*, try to make science and religion accord; and confess in the end that they have failed. Perhaps that we may learn to have the grace to wait, knowing that God is bringing up the world, and content meanwhile to believe in what appear to be contrary truths.

But now and then a prophet of God is raised up able to tell us all things, and such an one is S. John. He did and could reconcile the difficulties of the early Christians, for the time was come and he was the man. He was enabled to reveal the mystery of that "Word" which was baffling the thought of men. Though the conflict rages now between science and religion, as then between philosophy and religion, we also find in the fourth Gospel leaves of the Tree of Life for the healing of the nations.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."¹ Here we have, in a single, wonderful sentence, deliverance from harassing perplexities of the intellect, and satisfaction for the inmost cravings of the heart. In these days, when Evolution has changed the basis of human thought, when, if we trace ourselves back to the beginning, we find our origin in some low form of life, when, if we look forward to the end, we find, if we have lost our first faith, no place for angel or spirit or any such thing, what a rest of soul it is to know that "in the beginning was the Word and the Word was God." With this knowledge we can face the beginning and the end. Our painful curiosity about our origin and our end is not satisfied, but our thoughts are diverted, and we find rest in the divine Person with whom is all knowledge.

How satisfying to the hungering heart of man, again, is *the Word*. Every human heart craves for perfect intimacy, comprehension, love, allowance, praise and blame that is just, understanding of faults and failures, and of those aspirations which are our true measure. In

the Word which is God we find all these. The barriers of flesh are nothing to the Word which is “quick and powerful as a two-edged sword,” Who penetrates our being to comfort, teach, and guide, “Who knows as we are, yet loves us better than He knows,” for the Word is God, and “all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do” (Heb. iv., 13). The Word, who is God, is our one intimate Friend, our unfailing Companion, and, if the beginning is a “sunless gulf of doubt” to us, He was there and all is well. “His name is called the Word of God,” we are told (Rev. ix., 11–16) in almost the closing scene of the Bible, and there we have the vision of the Word in His majesty, and worship before the divine Person. “The Word was with God.” It is not good for man to be alone and a lonely, isolated God is remote from the sympathies of men; but, ever, “the Word was with God,” the perfect love of the divine Son and of the divine Father was there through all eternity.

It would appear as if a different name of Christ, that is, a different aspect of His divine personality were to be presented to men at different stages in the history of thought. In earlier days the habit was to speak of Christ as “the Way,” for men were looking for a way. In S. John’s time, men of different schools of thought were thinking of the *Logos*, and striving to reconcile difficulties; in this name, *the Word*, was the reconciliation they sought. Possibly the new name that will interpret Christ to men, and reconcile, once for all, science and religion, is “the Life,” when God shall have raised up a man to give us this revelation.

(From notes taken down by a Student.)

¹ St. John’s Gospel, chapter i., verse 1.