

SCALE HOW "MEDITATIONS."

Dominus Illuminatio Mea.

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S. John's Gospel: The Prologue, verses 12–18.

(v. 12.) To believe in His Name

"Is given to Faith, affectionate and free,
Not wrought by force of self-confounding thought."

(v. 13.) A man cannot work himself into belief from any motives of what has well been called "eternal selfishness"—"not for the sake of gaining Heaven nor of escaping Hell"—not by the will of the flesh is the faith born which recognizes the Word, neither by the will of man—no intellectual effort, no self-confounding thought, will discover the Word to us—but by the will of God we believe. Let us not suppose that God wills, chooses, that some of us should receive the power to become the sons of God and others should never have this power. Is it not rather that our will must embrace the will of God, must accept the ineffable mystery, adore the grace, be so united with the will of God that no perplexity baffles our understanding, because we do not seek to understand? Then Faith, affectionate and free, the vision of the Son of God, is possible, and, with the vision, comes the power to become more and more, eternally, the child of God.

(v. 14.) "The Word became flesh." In these four words we have summed up the story before which myriads of Christian souls have bowed in tender reverence—the story of the Birth in Bethlehem. It would seem as if, in all ages and in all countries, there had been in human hearts a desire, so universal as to be prophetic of its own fulfilment,—the desire that "the gods" would "come down to us in the likeness of men." Our hearts are wiser than our heads; the intellect of man says, "this thing is impossible;" the heart insists that this is the only satisfaction for its wistful desires, that there must be a Man, Who fulfils all that is possible to man, Who is God, and Who links us with God. "And dwelt among us," not visited us as the wind, we know not whence or whither, but went in and out among us with human ways like our ways and needs like our needs and tendernesses like our tendernesses, so that we could rivet our eyes upon Him and see and be satisfied. "And we beheld His glory," says S. John, not his.

"To overlook the glory close and near"; he beheld with the fixed gaze of love and discipleship, and he knew that that which he beheld of lowly living and service and suffering was "glory." Perhaps this is one of the secrets of life—to know "glory" when we see it. Moses prayed, "I beseech Thee show me Thy glory," and the answer was, "I will make all My goodness pass before thee," and for three and thirty years all the goodness of God, which is His glory, passed up and down in the eyes of men. "I ever taught," He says, "where all the Jews come together." The luxury of seclusion was not for Him. A life never out of sight was a life always divine; but only the few disciples "beheld." The rest of the world judged Him according to its

own measure and called Him names which it pains us to repeat. His “glory” is still in the world, not in the full measure in which S. John beheld it, but a little here and a little there wherever any humble soul seeks to walk in the light and to go about doing good. May we behold His “glory” wherever it is, and cast from our eyes all bandages of pride and prejudice which could blind us to a single ray of the light that comes from Him.

“Full of grace and truth”; here are the tests by which we shall know His glory wherever it shines. “Grace” is hard to define; “the touch of God” an old writer calls it, and perhaps we can go no further; but our every-day words “graceful” and “gracious” help us. The quite fit action or word is, we say, “graceful,” and we can say no more. We mean that it is the very word which should have been spoken, said just at the right time, just in the right way, neither more nor less than was fitting, or the very act that should have been done. “Gracious” implies more; the word or the act is not only beautifully fit in itself, but is kind and cordial and fit towards us who receive it. It comes to us with a smiling benediction. The baby who stretches out a hand to one does the little act with a strange graciousness. Our gracious Queen is “gracious” when she sits beside the beds of her sick soldiers; the act is so fit and so perfect in itself and towards them. Now and then we may say graceful things, and do gracious things; but with what a sense of infinite goodness comes before us that Life which was full of grace, which never, no not for an instant, entertained an ungracious thought. And these conceptions of “graceful” and “gracious” touch only the fringe of the garment of grace. It was well for S. John to behold this “glory.” May our eyes also be unveiled!

“And truth.” At the first glance we do not find ourselves quail before this standard of measurement as before the other. We may not be gracious or graceful, we say, but at any rate we are honest. Are we? What of the idle talk with which we entertain each other? Does nothing pass our lips but that which is our sincere, carefully thought-out, conviction? Do we never express regard or consideration or approval or disapproval but in the exact measure in which we feel it? We need not go on with such questions as these: we are convicted before the first, and feel that absolute truth is impossible to us. But this Man, Whose “glory” S. John beheld, walked about in the world with a lamp of truth, as it were, Whose ray flashed straight into the heart of every subject He spoke upon, every person He looked upon; and new things, strange things, an inverted order of things, came to light,—the last became first and the first became last. May He illuminate us with His truth that we may see His “glory” in the things which are least, and not be dazzled by the sham glory of the things which the world calls great.

(v. 15.) We return to the witness of S. John Baptist. “He is become before me,” the Baptist says, “for He was before me.” Probably we have here the secret of all witness for Christ. It appears so simple that we are inclined to say, “Of course.” “Of course” Christ was before the Baptist, and “of course” Christ is before us in the sense of the one with the greater claims. Surely of this there can be no question. Well for us if we can say this in spirit and in truth, for the essence of all idolatry lies in this—the preferring of “I myself” to any other—to the Christ of God. This besetment is so subtle that we can hardly be aware of it. It takes the guise of penitence, anxiety, humility, of the feelings we call our best and holiest. But self-occupation, whether in the form of self-depreciation or self-exaltation, is giving self that place of preference which is due to Another. It is less easy, than it seems, to arrive at the standpoint of the Baptist and to recognise that in all things Christ is before us, is of more consequence than we are, is to

be considered and thought upon first in all our troubles and perplexities. This is not born of the flesh; it is of God.

(v. 16.) But the sense of spiritual effort need not depress us. The fulness which S. John beheld and proceeds to set before us, in the Gospel, is for us all: we all receive of it and “grace for grace.” “The phrase means a continual recurrence of kindnesses.”¹ This is a phrase to be thankful for. We are all aware of the continual kindnesses of God. Every day brings some surprising delicacy of kindness that touches us, and yet we do not boldly say to ourselves— “This is a special kindness shown to me by God; this comes out of the fulness of the grace and graciousness of Jesus Christ.” If He is so wonderfully kind in the small things of every-day life, He will not be less kind in the greater things. He Himself will enable us to put Him in that first place in our thoughts which belongs to Him and to leave off troubling about ourselves. This is due to us of His grace.

(v. 17.) “The law was given by Moses.” I suppose most of us grow up under the discipline of the law. “I must try and leave some fault behind while I am young. I am trying very hard to do so, but I find it very difficult. I think of Life’s Ladder; every fault I conquer I get one step higher, do I not?” I quote from the letter of a little girl. We all go through it. We all know what it is to toil up this ladder of perfection and, when we think we have gained a round or two, to find we have slipped back to the old place or lower; but, “grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.” Grace, continual kindness, help, and comfort. Truth, revelation, insight, the power to see Him as He is and, in the strength of love, to rise into that holiness which is not individual perfection, though that also comes of it, but the power to put Him first.

(v. 18.) This is how we may know God and see Him Who is invisible. The Son hath declared Him, hath revealed to us a mystery, inconceivable to the heart of man, the Humility of our God.

It would seem to us almost a pity to touch upon in advance, and in a cursory way, many thoughts that are worked out in detail as the Gospel goes on, but this is S. John’s method. He begins with a prologue which arrests our attention, stirs our heart, touches the deepest things of our life, puts us, in fact, into that attitude of mind which should enable us to perceive, as he goes on to unveil the Word, a little now and a little again as we are able to bear it.

¹ Rhythmic [sic] translation of *The Imitation of Christ*.