

SCALE HOW "MEDITATIONS."

Dominus Illuminatio Mea.

No. 14.¹

THE HEALING OF THE NOBLEMAN'S SON.

(*S. John, chapter iv, 43–54.*)

May 22, 1898.

(v. 43.) "After *the* two days," *i.e.*, the two days He spent in Samaria. From thence our Lord journeyed north into Galilee. The reason is curious, for Jesus Himself testified "that a prophet," &c. Our Lord's use of this proverbial saying to account for His action appears to strike the Evangelist as it strikes us, with a little shock, and yet with a sense of gratification. Popular proverbs, which, so to say, embody the common sense of the people, are an expression of that practical quality which we least expect to find in our Lord. The mystic, the idealist shews every sense but common sense; he has no capacity for detail, and often spoils his life because he cannot conduct it to the issues he has in view. But our Lord's frequent adoption of popular sayings is a sanctification of common sense, an assertion that to use this practical quality in the conduct of our life is a fulfilment of divine law. This is especially to be noted by young people, who are not apt to glorify common sense. The mere enthusiast would have remained in Jerusalem, and forced his mission upon the Jews. Christ retired into Galilee, and gives us the reason.

"No honour." This is true in everyday experience. Wordsworth was "a homely kind of man" to the cottager at Grasmere; the greatest praise for White of Selborne was that "he had no harm in him." It is, in fact, a happy provision. People who are doing great work can always find rest and retirement among their own people. "Own country." Our Lord's own country was Judea, the kingdom of the Jews, His chosen people, to whom He had just announced His mission in the cleansing of the temple,— "The Lord shall suddenly come to His temple." He had found no acceptance. It was the aliens of Samaria and the despised Galileans who "received Him."

(v. 45.) "Having seen all the things that He did in Jerusalem." We only read of one thing. Here we have again a suggestion of many things. The Galileans, unlike the Samaritans, adhered to the Jewish religion, and went up to the feasts. They would have two days to tell of the words and works of the prophet that had arisen in Jerusalem. Again we notice, as in Samaria, the readiness of the provinces to receive and believe when the capital refused and condemned.

(v. 46.) "He came unto Cana." We may surmise that He came to "water" the seed of truth sown at the marriage feast [sic] "A certain nobleman," officer or courtier, attached to the court of Herod Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee, a Jew, apparently, as was the tetrarch. "Capernaum," which came to be known as our Lord's own city, a thriving town in the fertile plain to the south-west of the lake, dear to Christians as having afforded a home to our Lord, but memorable as the scene of lost opportunities. According to Christ's prediction, not one

stone has been left upon another, and the very site of the city is disputed.

(v. 47.) Here we come upon another of the marvellous silhouettes of the Gospel narratives. It would seem as if a spiritual searchlight were thrown upon each individual who comes before our Lord, and the whole life and character is revealed in a few sentences. This "nobleman" is presented to us first as an agonised father, shewing that depth and strength of family affection which is peculiarly a Jewish trait. His son was "at the point of death," and he "besought" that Christ would "come down and heal him." "When he heard," &c. It would appear that he, too, had been among the witnesses of the many things that Christ did in Jerusalem, and, like many of us when we are driven to bay, he turned to Christ as a possible source of help. On reading the narrative we feel that, in his case, as in our own, such coming as this is an act of faith; but "Christ meets him with reproof."

(v. 48.) Our Lord speaks to him as a representative of his class, and as if he already knew him and read the secret of his heart, the lack of effort to *will*. "Ye *will* in no wise believe." This *will* power is often referred to by our Lord. "If any man *will* to do the will of God." "And ye *would* not." This active *will* to believe appears to be the one condition enacted by our Lord. Men must bring the will; Christ will give the power, and by the union of the two the miracle of the new birth is accomplished. Let us note here the simple means by which great ends are accomplished. The satisfying joy, the fulness of life, which comes of the recognition of Christ, is to be brought about, so far as our part is concerned, by an effort of will. The unhappy thing is that few people recognise how the will of man works. They are content to believe that to will is to resolve, and that there is a certain strength in such resolution which shall accomplish its end. Now, the fact seems to be that *willing* fulfils itself by an effort of attention. Let us fix our thoughts upon that which we desire to know or to do, and turn away our thoughts from that which we would avoid, and we have the secret of *willing*. Most people desire the "joy of the Lord," but they do not will, do not fix their regard upon the Person and work of Christ. We are helped in this effort of meditation by the suggestions of His creatures—the lamb, the Lamb of God, the sun, the Sun of Righteousness, the fowls of the air, and the lilies of the field, and the reeds shaken by the wind, and the corn in the ear, and the tree putting forth its leaves;—these are things upon which He has looked, and of which He has spoken, and which, by the very laws of our minds, should keep the thought of our Lord present with us. "Except ye see signs and wonders." The object of signs and wonders is probably not to convince but to attract, to challenge attention, and this attention is the first step towards *willing*. If we *will* fix our thoughts steadily upon Christ, we shall be surprised into such an outgoing of love and worship as we little thought ourselves capable of. But we must do our part. Vague aspirations are not to be mistaken for definite *willing*.

The nobleman recognised in our Lord no more than a worker of signs and wonders. He did not, as that other who said, "Speak the word only," see in Him the Spring and Source of life.

(v. 49.) "Sir, come down," etc. We begin to know this man. He has need of Christ; comes to Him in trouble, and he would not have known to do that had he not been interested in what he had heard and seen. He was probably one of those men of the world who would to-day claim to be interested in all things, absorbed in none. His answer shows that his attention is fixed not upon Christ, on the words of Christ, or on the reproof he had called down on himself, but solely upon his child and his own need. He reiterates his request, "Sir, come down ere my child die."

(v. 50.) "Jesus saith," etc. Here we see our Lord's tender graciousness, His heart going out in sympathy and pity, in the friendly, reassuring, "Go thy way." He can imagine, had they been English, a kindly hand would have been laid on the father's shoulder. He is sent away reassured—"Thy son liveth." Now the man begins to know Christ. By speaking with Him face to face knowledge came, as it comes to us in prayer and meditation. Had the man not grown in faith he would again have urged our Lord to "come down."

(v. 51.) "His servants met him." We imagine the meeting between the man and the friendly slaves. He was probably a good master, and therefore his servants shared his anxieties with eager, eastern sympathy. "His son lived," translatable by some such form as "is doing well."

(v. 52.) "So he enquired," etc. From his question we perceive that a complete change has taken place in the man's mental standpoint. He thought now, not first of his son, but of what Christ had said. His anxiety is to connect his child's restoration with the healing word that had been spoken.

(v. 53.) "Yesterday, at the seventh hour." The answer satisfied him, and he and his house believed. At first sight the faith would seem to be sudden and superficial, depending solely on the healing; but the journey from Cana appears to have occupied a considerable time, and this man, like the thief upon the cross, appears to have passed the hours, not in a fever of anxiety and hope about his son, but in the contemplation of Christ. We gather that a complete change has been wrought in his mind. He has been "born again." His household shared his joy, as they had shared his grief, for great is the power of faith and great is individual influence.

(v. 54.) The "second sign." Only this one miracle is recorded by S. John during that circuit of Galilee of which the Synoptic Gospels give a rather full account.

¹ In consequence of the P.N.E.U. Conference no "Meditation" was sent out last week.