

SCALE HOW "MEDITATIONS."

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*Dominus Illuminatio Mea.*

No. 17.

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

(*S. John v., 24–29.*)

"As is the Father, so is the Son."

We have considered so far how the divine Son establishes His equality with the Father—equality in subjection, equality in co-operation and equality in diverse operation. It is deep teaching, reaching the heart with a conviction which should affect all our human relations; and our Lord adds, "he that heareth My word," with that inner hearing of the heart, and "believeth on Him that sent Me"—for He Himself is the Word, as it were the *utterance* of God to us—"he hath eternal life." There is no judgment for those who understand and believe, because their unity with the Son is as the Son's unity with the Father. They comprehend His ways with men; they share His counsels; they further His purposes; they live His life; where there is this fulness of accord, judgment is impossible. They fail, and fall short, and mourn over their failings, because they are human, but their *will* is at one with His will; there is no separation. They *know* the Father and the Son, and this is eternal life; "eternal," not a joy reserved for future reward, but fulness of living now—"hath." "Hath passed out of death into life"—as one passes out of one room into another, easily, naturally, instantaneously. We have all made the passage many times in our lives, when we pass from bitterness and anger and strife and soreness of heart into love and peace and joy and the consciousness of the presence of God.

"Life." Our Lord appears to be speaking in this connection of that liberty of soul, that vitality and joyousness of spirit, with which He speaks again when He says, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." It is "more life and fuller" that we want, that we crave sometimes with a sick craving; and we have a thousand ways of seeking that satisfaction which comes to us in only one way. Work, wine, art, pleasure, politics, the passion of love, all have been tried again and again, and have been found wanting. They give, indeed, the sort of galvanic life of the moment, which fails so soon as the stimulus is no longer applied. But life, no longer conscious of limitations, life of joyous, generous, expansion, free and gay as the bird's life, dutiful and humble as the life of angels—this sort of glad living is the instant reward and result of that recognition of the Son which we call faith.

It is not difficult to distinguish between "eternal" life and that life of the hour with which men seek to fill the void when the eternal life is not theirs. Eternal life is like the life of God, because it is the life of God. It is outgoing, generous, always giving, never grasping and seeking: nature and art, literature and history, all men everywhere,—these are its interests; these offer the wide field for its expansion. But the life of the hour, however fair it may be, is like the sea-anemone, all whose flower-like tentacles, spread abroad, not to give but to get, drawing food

for the creature who is a mere sac, getting all things and not giving. We all know the pleasant-mannered, well-dressed, people in whose company we never touch great interests.

(v. 25.) Our Lord will not lose touch with His audience. He perceives that this teaching of the deeper life has passed over their heads. They could not perceive or imagine a fuller life than that of the living, breathing, thinking men they knew themselves to be. Anything else they would have called mere mysticism, had the word been in their vocabulary. The "Teacher" descends to their level, and with the solemn "verily, verily," amen, amen, the one form of asseveration He ever uses, Christ brings before them a manner of death with which they are too familiar. It is as though He said—This life of which I speak to you is not a different thing, another life, from that which you call life, nor is the death I tell you of another manner of death; and that you may understand this, that your eyes may be opened to perceive the meaning of death and of life, the hour cometh when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live.

Our Lord's allusion is, we may believe, to the three resurrections He is about to work, when the visible, fleshly bodies of the widow's son, Jairus' daughter, and Lazarus, should pass out of the visible earthly death and back again into the visible earthly life, which, after all, is only a part and a figure of the far richer, fuller, gift of eternal life.

(v. 26.) "For as the Father hath life in Himself," etc. Here we have the secret disclosed which men in all ages have laboured to discover. At one time this dream was of an elixir which contained the subtle principle present in every leaf of every tree, in the giddy whirl of summer gnats, as truly as in man, present everywhere, but for ever eluding scrutiny and test. To-day we think we have advanced because we no longer speak of the vital principle as an elixir but as protoplasm, the chemical contents of which we know all about, but yet are we no nearer the divine secret. Here it is revealed. Life, all life, is in the Father and in the Son; and whether the abounding glorious life which we call Nature differs in kind or only in degree from the free life of the Spirit, is a matter we know nothing about. Our Lord here draws the two together, proclaims Himself the Lord of Life.

"And He gave Him authority to execute judgment." Judgment, like life, is not spiritual only, and is not physical only. But assuredly it is physical; we in the flesh suffer for every transgression of the laws of health and of purity. But judgment rests with Him who is also our life, and Who, because He is a Son of man, "knoweth our infirmities, and remembereth that we are but dust."

(v. 28.) "Marvel not at this." This high claim of the powers of life and death excited the marvel, probably the derision, of the Jews; and our Lord goes on to unfold that great mystery of the Christian faith—the general resurrection. There is no subject more baffling to human thought. On the one hand, our hearts assure us that those we have loved and lost must needs go on being alive, that the partings which agonise us cannot be final, and that, if we are to meet those dear to us again, it must be in the very form we had learned to love. We must see again "the lineaments of gospel books" in the countenances that have become dear to us. We must recognise the little tricks of manner and gesture by which our friend expressed that which he was. If we find him again, our hearts demand that we shall find the smile, the little gesture of the hand, the way he moved and spoke, "our hearts know how." But against this fond persuasion science has her irrevocable word. We know that that which we are will by-and-by move round with rocks and stones, will appear in the daisies that grow on our grave. Our faith

is staggered more than need be, for this absorption of the material particles which go to make us in other lower lives has been going on from our birth until our death, and it is no new thing that it should go on afterwards. How is it that the vital principle, the life, the self, shall make to itself that outer form which gives it expression in an instant of time? We do not know; we cannot even guess. But we do know that, given time, the years of our life, the thing *has* happened so. Every human soul has built up for itself that outer form which most expresses that which it is. We cannot understand how, but it is not impossible to conceive that that which it has taken years to accomplish with our low vitality and modicum of spiritual power may be achieved in an instant of time with the more intense vital conditions of the second life.

(v. 29.) But we do not know, we see through a glass darkly. What it does concern us to know we are definitely told. We shall all hear the voice of the Son of Man, and shall come forth, "they that have done good unto the resurrection of life" to the fulfilment of all aspirations, the unlimited expansion of interests, to work, perhaps, which shall be without labour, and which shall accomplish its intent, to fulness of love and of light and of joy. But we try in vain to understand; the heart of man has not conceived even a small part of what is covered by this word of Christ's—the "resurrection of life." "They that have done ill unto the resurrection of judgment." (R. V.) May we believe that there is a note of hope here? They to whom the judgment of the Son of Man reaches in this life are self-convicted, and where conviction of sin is, is there not also hope?