

SCALE HOW "MEDITATIONS."

Dominus Illuminatio Mea.

No. 18.

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

(*S. John v., 30–45.*)

(v. 30.) "I can of Myself do nothing." Our Lord repeats here the declaration of absolute unity with the Father with which this discourse began. We value independence, but we should do well to take heed that our independence is not separateness, which is of the nature of sin.

"As I hear I judge." Here we have conceivably a reference to the Third Person of the blessed Trinity. "The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord." "He wakeneth morning by morning, He wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned." We may believe it is to "the Spirit of counsel" Christ listens when He says, "As I hear, I judge." "My judgment is righteous, because I seek not mine own will." The gods of mythology have all one attribute—wilfulness, arbitrary action; they do as they like, because they choose. Man has made his gods after the image of his own heart; the undisciplined man, the ungodly man, is ever wilful. But Christ, in the very act of claiming to be one with the Supreme, offers in evidence the fact that He seeks not His own will but the will of Him that sent Him. It is for this that He can trust His own judgment. Our Lord, in this illuminating discourse, sets forth the arguments that prove His divinity. They are by no means such arguments as a man would have thought conclusive, but they are certain infallible proofs, and present to us an ideal only realised in Christ. They offer us tests, too, by which we may try our own character and motives, by which we may know how far we are following in the footsteps of His most holy life. Here is a test for all our decisions, great and small. Are we seeking our own will? If so, our judgment is not righteous. Are we seeking the will of Him that sent us? Are we listening to that Spirit of counsel who abides with us also? Then is our judgment righteous. We may trust to our decisions, and go on fearlessly without regard to consequences.

(v. 31.) "If I bear witness of Myself My witness is not true." Our Lord, like every orator who moves and teaches men, is following the thought of His audience. They apply to Him what is apparently a popular proverb:—"If a man bear witness of himself," etc. Our Lord accepts a condition from which He, if any, might have claimed exemption; but, with that meekness which so often amazes us, He throws in His lot with us all, and confirms for us a saying full of insight. Here we have another of those tests of character which only Christ can meet. Our restless vanity will not suffer us to wait for others to discover our superior parts or possessions. "I" is too often the theme of conversation. We are willing to admit that our talk about ourselves may be tiresome and may be boastful, but—"not true"? this we are hardly prepared for. It is worth remembering, however, and we may believe that we are so prejudiced upon the subject of our

own achievements, of our own shortcomings, of our successes, of that personality which we feel has not fair play, that we are not capable of the simple, absolute truth in speaking about ourselves. We err by excess, whether in self-condemnation or self-approval. It is well that we should restrain ourselves from regarding ourselves, and then we shall not be tempted to speak on this difficult and dangerous topic.

(v. 32.) "It is another," etc. Our Lord's reference appears to be to the general witness borne of Him by the Father.

(v. 33.) "Ye have sent unto John." The testimony of John seems to have been a treasured recollection, and we may believe that every poor word of ours spoken in love and service of our Master is kept in His remembrance.

(v. 34.) Our Lord is here referring to the witness of God, of which He is always conscious. We, too, have such a witness, for "the Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirits." Whatever Christ claims for Himself we also have in our measure.

"That ye may be saved." We unconsciously wonder as we read why our Lord condescends to unfold His own personality and His relations with the Father to these unbelieving Jews. Here we have the reason. He had none of the pride which scorns to explain, but, point after point, His argument is worked out conclusively. Our Lord's appeal is to the understanding of His hearers; a man might have appealed to their feelings, but He, who knew what was in men, knew that an idea received by the mind works itself out in the life, whereas a mere wave of emotion passes without a mark. This is why our Lord's teaching is so often argumentative, that by all means He may *convince* men and that they "may be saved." The opposite of "saved" is "lost;" lost in that ever-increasing hardness of heart which our Lord foresaw should culminate in the Crucifixion—the greatest crime ever done upon the earth. But the things Christ speaks of are things which they could not see with their eyes, things not demonstrable. He lifts reason above the plane of images received by the senses to the higher plane of those things which are spiritually discerned. It is still true that we must believe with our understanding, with our reason; the things of religion must be received by the mind before they can be felt by the heart; and to the present hour the difficulty is that it is the tendency of the human mind to exercise reason only on the plane of things demonstrable to the senses.

(v. 35.) "He was a lamp that burneth and shineth." For the second time our Lord bears witness to the Baptist; burning with that fire of God which we call enthusiasm, shining, giving light, because He carried the central fire. "Ye were willing to rejoice." Wherever the light of God is there is—

"Continual comfort in a face,
The lineaments of gospel books."

(v. 36.) Our Lord cites another witness—"the works which the Father hath given Me to accomplish." We are told of some of them, as, for example, the miracle which has just taken place—the healing of the impotent man. "Who went about doing good"¹ is the summary of the divine life given by the apostle Peter; doing good always, doing nothing but good ever. Here is another of those infallible proofs which none but the Son of God can offer. And here again is a test for us who follow: by our works we are judged, by God and by man. The careful, humble, conscientious work, and the ostentatious, casual, imperfect work—there they are for judgment.

We each stand or fall by “all such good works as Thou hast prepared for us to walk in.”

(v. 37.) “The Father . . . hath borne witness of Me.” Our Lord’s reference here is probably to the voice heard at His baptism.

(v. 39.) “Ye search the Scriptures,” etc. Our Lord appeals against the formalism of their religion. They cannot discern what is said in those very Scriptures, which they all but worship, regarding Him of whom the law and the prophets did testify.

(v. 40.) “And ye *will* not come to Me.” Another pathetic lament over those *unwilling wills*, reminding us of the “and ye *would* not” in the lament over Jerusalem.

(v. 41.) “I receive not glory from men,”—another infallible proof. Who can say this but the Son of man? The facile nature seeks popularity; the more strenuous, labours for power; and in one of these two—popularity or power—consists the glory that comes from men.

(v. 42.) Insomuch as we take to ourselves this “glory” Christ knows us, and we may know ourselves, that we “have not the love of God in ourselves.”

(v. 43.) “I am come in my Father’s name,” etc. This is true to-day. The person who comes in his own name, puts forth pretensions to genius, learning, skill, and what not, receives a cordial recognition; while the higher soul who is wedded to his art or his work for its own sake, to whom the simple doing of his duty is the sole aim of life, is not received, or the recognition he gets is tardy.

(v. 44.) “How can ye believe?” At first it is not easy to see why a man cannot believe in God and receive glory from his fellows; but we cannot serve two masters nor worship two gods; this glory from men is the incense burned in that subtlest of all idolatries—the worship of self, and there is no place for the glory of God. What is the glory that cometh from God? “I beseech Thee show me Thy glory,” was the prayer of Moses; and the answer was, “I will make all My goodness pass before thee.” In the face of Christ we behold all the goodness of God and the glory of God, but only as our eyes are purged from the film of self and anointed with the oil of the divine Spirit.

(v. 45.) One more witness our Lord summons, even Moses, that very prophet whom the Jews were setting in opposition to Christ, and who pronounced their accusation; for they glorified Moses, but did not believe his writings, or they would have understood the teaching of Christ.

¹ Acts x., 38.