

SCALE HOW "MEDITATIONS."

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*Dominus Illuminatio Mea.*

No. 20

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

Christ our "Providence."

*(S. John vi., 15–22.) Part II.*

(v. 15.) "Jesus therefore perceiving," etc. The multitude followed the common instinct of men. The "loaf" giver has ever been the lord or the lady, the queen or the king. May we venture to think that our Lord withdrew Himself into the mountain alone to pray, as we are told in S. Mark, against another temptation of the devil? Anyway, this forcing of kingship upon Him was exactly on the lines of the early temptation—"all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them." Since then, two years of incessant labour—labour of the most depressing kind, the continual forcing of a higher ideal upon unwilling souls—had intervened and His kingdom had not come. Even of the disciples it is said at this period, "they understood not concerning the loaves, for their heart was hardened." [S. Mark vi., 52.] What wonder if, when men declined to enter into that Kingdom of God which He came to establish, the Saviour should for a moment be tempted by the possibility of a temporal kingship for the opportunities it would give of bestowing those "gifts for men," which men would not receive at His hands. But Jesus withdrew Himself, took time to be alone, took time to pray, and the moment of temptation passed. Here we have an ensample for our guidance in those moments of popularity when we receive glory one of another. Let us withdraw for a time, let us be alone, let us pray.

(v. 16, 17.) The picture is familiar [sic] and dear—the sudden squall, as on our own mountain lakes, the disciples rowing for hours and making no headway, Christ watching them from the mountain—we might even imagine with His hand shading His eyes,—He sees their distress and their confusion is increased by the sudden darkness of the East. The fact that Jesus had not yet come to them increased their perplexity; possibly they expected Him to take another boat and join them.

(v. 18.) "The sea was rising by reason of the great wind that blew,"—a tempest, on a confined mountain lake, more full of risk than on the open sea.

(v. 19.) "They had rowed," etc. They had managed to make between three or four miles and were perhaps in mid sea when, out of the darkness, moving across the uneasy waters, they saw what at first filled them with affright. An apparition, they thought, not the less to be feared because it was the "ghost" of the Master. Was it He, or was it an evil spirit in His form, one of those demons which the superstitious mind has ever associated with darkness and tempest?

(v. 20.) Jesus sees their terror, and through all sounds of the tempest they hear the accents they had learned to love—"It is I, be not afraid!"

(v. 21.) "They were willing." They had been fearful and most unwilling that what they regarded as a spectre should come into their midst. They could bear the worst that the storm could do to them, even to shipwreck and death, but this added terror of the supernatural was

too awful to be endured. But they hear the voice of the Son of man, their hearts turn to Him and they are *willing*. However strange the scene, however awful His progress over the unstable waters, it is enough for them to know that it is He; they are willing to receive Him into the boat. "And straightway the boat was at the land." S. Mark tells us that the wind ceased, the weary leagues of troubled sea stretch no longer before them, straightway, immediately, they are at the haven where they would be.

We know well that this is more than miracle. It is a parable, a type of how the Master deals with us, His disciples, in the times of our darkness and distress, when we are nigh swallowed by the "waves of this troublesome world." We labour to right ourselves, to bale out the waters, to make headway by the strength of our own arms; darkness falls, we are desolate, alone, exhausted, hopeless of any salvation from the overwhelming waters of temporal or spiritual distress. But there is worse in store for us. We begin to be aware that we are fighting not against flesh and blood; spiritual terrors overwhelm us. Are the powers of darkness in league against us or are we in the hands of an angry God? And then, when we are at our extremity of grief or dismay, those divine accents fall on our ear. All of us perhaps, the evil and the good, have heard them at some time in our lives. In some hour of peril or of desolation, the "It is I" of Christ has come home to us: we have been brought face to face with our Lord. We know that it is He who is dealing with us, in His love and in His pity; no spirit of evil and no offended God. We become *willing* in this day of His power and receive Him into the sorely-tossed bark of our lives, and then we learn that all this has come upon us to give Him the opportunity to make Himself known as our Saviour and our Friend. For the distress vanishes, the troublous circumstances smooth themselves out, the end which we had been labouring for, and which seems so very far away, suddenly arrives. With Christ in the boat all is well with us. We realise for an instant the meaning of the Church of Christ when we catch a fleeting glimpse of the millions of troubled souls who through the ages have subsided into happy calm at the words, "It is I, be not afraid!" "In all time of our tribulation ... Good Lord deliver us."

But what for the person whose intellectual convictions will not allow him to receive the notion of a miracle, of any action contrary to the "laws of nature." Ichabod! he cries. The joy and comfort of this most blessed of the gospel stories has departed for him—that a living, breathing, man should walk upon the unstable waters, that a word should assuage the storm—these things are to him simply *impossible*. "Miracles do not happen" is his verdict. The contention is the old one. Has Spirit power over matter? Does the Spirit of God move over the face of the waters? Is there, in fact, any Spirit? There is no answer in the circle of facts to these questions. We cannot know unless we are willing to be raised to that higher plane of thought where the things of the Spirit are discerned. There is nothing to be said to those who frankly disavow, with the Sadducees, the Resurrection, angels, spirits and any such thing; but for those, who still hold their faith in God and who are yet quelled and discomforted by allusions to the "laws of nature," it is worth while to consider whether they are not occupying a quite untenable position. There is no middle way between absolute faith in God which is able to receive any miracle consistent with the divine character and further unfolding this character to us, and the standpoint of the materialist to whom miracle, prayer, and spirit are alike meaningless. The very phrase "laws of nature," convenient and necessary as it is to the scientific student, lands us in an unexpected region of thought when it is used in a final sense. For if Nature have laws which she has presumably originated, if these be the only laws we know

and obey, then is Nature sentient and we are in danger of reviving, under the august name of science, the Nature worship of more primitive societies.

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