

SCALE HOW "MEDITATIONS."

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*Dominus Illuminatio Mea.*

No. 19.

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

Christ our "Providence."

(*S. John vi., 1–14.*) *Part I.*

(v. 1.) "These things" include all the intermediate events of the second year of our Lord's ministry. We have the first event recorded when He went up to a feast of the Jews, probably the Passover, and healed the impotent man; then S. John leaves a wide gap to be filled up from the three Synoptic Gospels. The events include many miracles, as the raising of Jairus' daughter and the widow's son; the teaching by parables; the sending out of the twelve, and their return, wearied after perhaps a two months' mission, with much to tell and much to learn; and our Lord bids them, "Come ye apart into a desert place and rest awhile," thus, in His character of His people's providence, providing rest and refreshment for the over-worked. May we not venture to believe that He Himself was willing to share in the rest of the "desert," *i.e.*, solitary place. We know the sequel—how Jesus and His disciples crossed the lake at the north to reach that other Bethsaida, a scattered hamlet on the north-east shore; how the people saw Him go, and followed Him by land round the head of the lake with such eager haste that they did outrun Him; how He "had compassion" on them as sheep having no shepherd and "welcomed them," and "taught them many things," until at last the prudent disciples came with that conviction of their own superior common sense, which appears now and again in the gospel narratives, to counsel Him to send the people away that they might buy bread in the villages before night overtook them. S. John, the latest of the evangelists, tells only so much of the story, already familiar to the Church, as is necessary to introduce that teaching of the "Bread of Life" which follows upon it, and which he alone gives in detail.

(v. 2.) "They beheld the signs." S. John adds something to the narrative. He tells us that, with the multitude, the signs which had been done had served their purpose: they had arrested attention, filled the people with eager desire to see the Prophet who had done these things; as well as to serve their own sick, for He healed "such as had need of healing." Here we have two conditions of the spiritual life fulfilled; the people came ready to receive, and our Lord gave them freely of the spiritual food which ministers to eternal life—"He taught them many things." We wonder how it was that the followers of Christ did not number many thousands of the faithful, instead of the handful gathered in the upper room, waiting for the coming of the Holy Ghost. But a third condition is necessary; men must not only attend and receive spiritual food, but they must assimilate it with some process answering to what we call digestion in the case of physical food; they must meditate upon what they have heard, ponder it in their hearts, "keep" it, live upon it. Apparently this condition was not fulfilled by the multitudes who listened

eagerly to the words of Jesus; and perhaps the reason why many of us have to lament the little progress we make in the spiritual life is just this—that we attend and receive, but do not ponder upon what we hear. We “enjoy” a sermon, give ourselves up to a “mission,” *feel* a good deal stimulated, our emotions are stirred; and, in a week or less, the whole thing has passed away from our thought; we recollect that we enjoyed an access of spiritual fervour; but make no attempt to keep up that living warmth. The reason is obvious; nothing comes without labour, least of all the things of God; and, having heard, we are apt to give ourselves no further trouble. We let the truth remain with us if it will, but we do not stir up our sluggish minds to keep it, to go over what we have heard, point by point, many times, examining ourselves as to how far we are living upon the new truth or the new aspect of truth which has come to us.

(v. 3.) “There He sat.” Apparently after the teaching and miracles, sat wearied, as upon that well at Samaria, because much “virtue” had gone out of Him.

(v. 4.) “The Passover.” The third Passover of the ministry, to which our Lord appears not to have gone up.

(v. 4.) [sic] “Lifting up His eyes.” How grateful we are to the tender love of the evangelist which saw and regarded these little personal acts of the Master. It is good and dear to the heart of Christendom to know that “Jesus lifted up His eyes,” that “there He sat with His disciples.” Why? We can hardly tell. It is as the little familiar gestures of those we love are dear to us; as Browning wrote: “My heart knows how,” of a gesture of his wife’s.

Shakespeare expressed the feeling for us when he wrote,—

“Over whose acres walked those blessed feet;”

he gives us the sense of the deepest love we are capable of, combined with surpassing reverence.

“Saith unto Philip.” This appears to be after the interposition of the apostles. Philip is honoured with an opportunity for a great venture of faith; and perhaps in the regard of Christ an act of faith is more vital and enduring than any act of service. How we wish it had been ours to answer—“Thou, O Lord, canst give them to eat.”

(v. 6.) “This He said to prove him;” and, alas, Philip was proved—tried, tested—and found wanting. Is it caution, ineffable conceit, contrariness? What is it that hinders us when the opportunity comes for a generous response, a hearty confidence, if only in the mere expression of an opinion, to those who seek to be encouraged at our hands? We damp their ardour, we counsel caution, we pile up difficulties, nay impossibilities; we do not say—“Go and do the work thy hand findeth to do, and God be with thee.” These omissions of ours which occur in the course of conversation are not unnoted. Philip had a golden opportunity, and he lost it.

(v. 7.) “Two hundred pennyworth.” His view was the sordid one, which too many of us entertain—that want of money is an insuperable difficulty to any great act of generous service; and we are content to do nothing and sigh “Oh, if one were rich, what a lot of good one could do!” Philip’s is the sort of non-committal answer that most of us would have given on such an occasion.

(v. 8.) “Andrew . . . saith unto Him.” Andrew is more ready for a venture of faith. He is “Simon Peter’s brother,” and it was Simon Peter who made the great confession—“Thou art the Christ.” Andrew, too, sees great possibilities; had not the Master raised the dead and healed

the sick and gladdened the hearts of the wedding guests? Here was a lad with five barley loaves and two (small) fishes; enough to make a meal for one man, anyway; might not Jesus do something with these? But he is afraid of his own temerity; he has gone too far, committed himself to an impossibility, an absurdity even, and hastens to add with due caution—"But what are these among so many?"

(v. 10.) "Make the people sit down." This story, in all its details, is dear to us as an exquisite revelation of the mind of Christ,—the orderly sitting-down to a meal; the sitting in rows, open squares or oblong figures of even numbers, a hundred at each side and fifty across, probably twenty of such figures forming a circle around Christ and His disciples; the picturesque effect which caught the eye of the evangelist; "much grass in the place;" the expectant silence of the seated multitude as they regarded the absurdly small provision placed before them,—we see it all and love to think of our Lord standing in the midst dealing out bread to that multitude, as indeed He deals it out to us.

(v. 11.) "Having given thanks." Our grace before meals would be less a formality with us if we remembered its origin. We ponder the story and wonder at what point the miracle of the increase took place. The key to this miracle, as to that of the general resurrection, is to be found in the last chapter (v. 25). "He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself." Organic life can be sustained only upon organic life. If we feed upon that which is decayed we perish; and, as we have been told, that secret of life, which our scientists have been unable to track home, lies in Christ—"In Him was life." As for how, by what detailed process, the miracle took place, we know no more than we know how an ear of corn is built up, "first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear."

"Distributed." We read in the other gospels that Christ distributed to the disciples who in turn distributed to the people. So is it still, not immediately but mediately does He deal out to each of us our portions of the good things of life:—He "uses us to help each other so."

(v. 12.) "Gather up the broken pieces." Here is another illustration of the beautiful mind of Christ. Where there is all power and all riches there is no waste, but that care of material which belongs to those who know and realise how much is involved in the production of that which we call common.

(v. 14.) "This is of a truth the Prophet." The people were right. He who feeds us as a bird feeds her young ("open thy mouth wide and I will fill it"), supplies the manifold hunger of our manifold nature, He is the Prophet that cometh into the world.

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N.B.—Will subscribers who have not paid for this term's *Meditations* kindly send 1/- to Mr. George Middleton, Ambleside, *without delay*.