

SCALE HOW "MEDITATIONS."

Dominus Illuminatio Mea.

No. 22.

EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

(*S. John vi., 27–35.*)

"THE BREAD OF GOD."

(v. 27.) "For Him the Father, even God, hath sealed," that is, set apart for a peculiar office as a sovereign is set apart when he is anointed. The Son of man reveals Himself as set apart to be the continual Sustainer of mankind. What a thought of comfort in every time of famine that comes upon us—body, heart, or spirit—to know that there is a Sustainer standing by holding in His hands, offering for our acceptance, that very meat which we require at the moment.

(v. 28.) "What must we do," etc. The multitude is responding to the teaching of Christ. A *sincere* request for direction is a sign of grace, and that their question was sincere we know, because the first stirrings of grace in all our hearts lead us to the same enquiry. We perceive that there is a work of God to be done, and to be done by us, and we ask eagerly what it is,—

"That we may go and do it straight away."

We ask faithfully it is true, but we do not always keep silence in our hearts waiting for the reply of our Lord. We answer our own question according to our own inclinations. We rush into one kind of good work or another, and our work is not service, because it is spoiled by wilfulness. Even when we abide in that vocation to which we are called we find ways to spoil our work by that wilfulness which appears to us to be zeal. Then, health fails or spirits flag; we weary of our self-chosen labours, and especially do we weary of the people we have been trying to help or to serve. We say, "What's the good?" "It's no use trying." The poor are "ungrateful," our own belongings do not "understand" or "appreciate." For a time at any rate the works of God are not for us, and we settle down to go our own way until the Divine Voice shall appeal to us once again.

(v. 29.) "Jesus answered." Here we have our Lord's recognition of the sincerity of the speakers; His answer to the thoughts of their hearts is also an answer to the words they have spoken. He tells them and us, for all time, what is the work of God. They have spoken of "works" manifold. Christ replies that for all men, everywhere, there is but one work of God. They had spoken of *doing*; Christ replies that this one work of God does not consist in *doing*, but in *believing*—"that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent." In other words, the thing that matters in the sight of God (and indeed in that of men also) is not what we do, but the attitude of our minds in doing it. It is not easy to see at first how believing on Christ is indeed working the works of God. But let us consider for a moment what we mean by believing in a person.

Such faith is an act of recognition, born of close attention for hours, or months, or years. We have considered the ways of this person in whom we believe, and by the intuition of sympathy have apprehended his motives. We *know* him; we recognise him, and our faith cannot be shaken. That which we admire we must needs imitate and we mould ourselves on the pattern of the person in whom we believe. This is believing on the ordinary human level. To believe in Christ is this, with an added element which makes the transforming power complete. First we think upon Him; we dwell upon every circumstance of His life, every word of His teaching; we keep Him in all our thoughts. We eat and drink, not only at the blessed Sacrament, but at all times, "in remembrance of Him." We begin to see that He lived all His years to lose His life, not once at the end, but all the time, and

"sore paineth
Us this continual Dying that constraineth."

The world is to us a place in which to have and to hold the things of the mind, of the heart, of the world; but *His* outstretched hands grasped not any treasure. We choose to be free and independent, to go where we list, to do what we like; *His* feet, nailed to the cross, moved not on His pleasure. We love to rule, to have our own way, to be of importance; Christ said, "I am among you as he that serveth." We choose to be independent, to have our own way; Christ claims to act always as one "sent." As we meditate upon Christ, as we learn to believe on Him, to realise that all blessedness lies in sacrifice and service, in lowliness and meekness, we begin to understand how great is the conversion that must take place in us if we are ever to have in us the mind that was in Christ Jesus. We become irritated and impatient; we find it unnatural and impossible to take this Life for our pattern.

(v. 30.) So the multitude. "What then doest Thou for a sign that we may see and believe?" This was not what they wanted—a Person who should fulfil all righteousness before their eyes, and lift them out of the unrighteousness and selfishness which was easy and pleasant into that sore and difficult beauty of holiness which was His. No, but they would be as the birds of the air who find a table ever spread. They would feed on continual manna; they would have what they wanted, whatever good things their souls desired. That and that only was the use of a Lord to them. Had they not had a sign? had not five thousand of them eaten and been filled of what should have been a scanty meal for two or three? Yes, and therefore they perceived the power in Christ to be another Moses to them, and to give them from day to day the bread without labour for which they clamoured. Before we condemn this careless multitude, let us ask ourselves whether our own demands of our Lord are in any way like theirs. Do we come to Him chiefly for meat that perisheth?

(v. 32.) "It was not Moses that gave you the bread." Our Lord is not wearied with the wilfulness of the people. In answer to their querulous demand He reveals the origin of all that nourishes men in body, soul, and spirit. The poet who fires us with high thoughts, the inventor who makes the ways of life easy, the farmer who produces bread—it is not Moses nor another; not any of these from whom we get the food that quickens us—they are but the vehicles.

(v. 33.) "The bread of God" is one however it be conveyed, and is to be known by two signs:—It cometh down out of heaven and is holy, heavenly, undefiled; and it giveth life unto the world. The life-giving thought or discovery, the food and the teaching by which men live,

are all of Him.

(v. 34.) Again we see ourselves in the crowd: when we think of these things our hearts burn within us; we, too, would cry with them, "Lord, evermore give us this bread," howsoever poor and material was their conception of the bread they asked for.

(v. 35.) Again our Lord responds to a sincere prayer, if a shallow one. He reveals to their slow hearts the central truth of all our living—"I am the Bread of Life: he that cometh to Me shall not hunger, and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst." We all know something of the hunger of the heart and the thirst of the soul. We find our cup of life poor and unsatisfying; we want to know and to have and to do great things. We are sick of the trivial round, the common task, weary of the people about us, weary of ourselves, bored, dissatisfied, discontented; we do not know what is the matter with us, but all the time we are fainting for hunger, famishing for thirst. We seek for satisfaction at many sources. We ask, above all things, to be amused, constantly amused, so that there may be no time for our thoughts to turn back upon themselves. We would have love, lawful or unlawful; excitement, passion, the lusts of the flesh—anything to deliver us from the sameness of every day. Knowledge, too, we would have above that which is written, whether from the "Mahatma" or the "Medium"; but in none of these things do we find rest. People go about with the lines of weariness and discontent engraved upon their faces, for how can a hungry man feel satisfied, and how can one be content unless he is satisfied? The "unrest of the age," what is it but the hunger of the heart and the thirst of the soul, to be satisfied alone by Him who is the sole Sustenance provided for men? "He that cometh to Me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst." There are people who are dissatisfied with the present and hopeless for the future—pessimists they are called—and there are others who have glorious optimistic dreams for the future but expect nothing from the present. There are, too, those to whom the present, incomplete as it is, yields full content and satisfaction; because they are they for whom it is written that they shall neither hunger nor thirst; they to whom the final Source of satisfaction is ever open.