

Dominus Illuminatio Mea.

SCALE HOW "MEDITATIONS."

No. 25.

TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

(*S. John vi., 61–68.*)

THE DISLOYAL DISCIPLES.

(v. 60.) "This is a hard saying." We have seen that to those disciples who followed Christ, with some measure of personal attachment no doubt, but also with an eye to their own advancement in the Messianic Kingdom, the words of Christ were "a hard saying." They had reason—"Have we not thrown up our means of livelihood, given up our homes, our own people, cast everything into this one venture, and now the whole thing turns out to be a delusion, and we are thrown on the world without any prospects at all? We cannot keep a house and spread a table with this manner of meat and drink." We are grieved for the hardness of their hearts; we think, perhaps, that had we listened we should have better understood. But we who think we understand this word of Christ's, "I am the Bread of Life," do we never ask ourselves, *cui bono?* when we come to some "hard saying," when our good is evil spoken of, when our best efforts lack success, when we, too, appear to have left all and followed Christ, and got nothing by it, do we never think to ourselves that it is "hard;" or are we indeed most able in these times of our hunger and our thirst to come to Christ and eat and drink and be satisfied? If this is not so, if our spirits quail before every adverse wind, we had better see to it that we are not among the disloyal disciples who find that special word of Christ to us which is our life in this world, a "hard saying." "Who can hear it?" Who can put up with crosses and losses without any shrinking of faith? There are those who can; and they discover that by these things men live, and that in all such is the life of the Spirit. They discover that that life, which comes to us from feeding on the Bread of Life, is apt to be most vigorous and active in times of dearth and distress.

The disciples had more excuse than we. They had hardly had time to realise that their leader was their king, nor to ask themselves—What is the one duty which a subject owes to his king? We know that loyalty is our first duty and our last duty, and includes all our duties. Loyalty is the hall-mark of character; and all men are divided into two sorts—the loyal, who are few, but whose lives are beautiful in quietness and confidence; and the disloyal, who are many. All loyalty to each other is loyalty to our Master. Let us be loyal in all our relations, loyal in our words, loyal in even our passing thoughts, and so shall we be loyal in the supreme relation. A precious jewel does not keep itself [sic], it must be safeguarded; a precious perfume evaporates from an unstoppered bottle; and loyalty is the jewel and the perfume of the gentle life, which it is our business to keep. How are we to know when it is passing from us?

(v. 61.) "His disciples murmured at this." The murmuring spirit which finds nothing quite good enough for its deserts in heaven or on earth; not the weather, nor friends, nor

circumstances, nor even Almighty God; the spirit which sees the mote in its brother's eye and is blind to the beam in its own eye, this is the spirit that occupies the empty house when the loyal temper has flown. We cannot murmur and be loyal; nor can we take any one bit of our lives apart and murmur at that, and yet be loyal. It distresses us to know that the murmurs of these men pierced the heart of Christ; that the iron entered into His soul when they would not receive the word of life which He gave them; then may our loyalty be pleasant to our King, and may no murmuring of ours wound Him. "Doth this cause you to stumble?"

(v. 62.) "What then if ye should behold the Son of man ascending where He was before?" "Would ye then be convinced," our Lord seems to say, "that the things I have said to you are real things and not dreams; that mine is indeed a glory greater than that of any earthly king; or would ye still harden your hearts and say that your concern is not with the Son of man, or with heaven, but is only for 'what ye shall eat and what ye shall drink and wherewithal ye shall be clothed'?"

(v. 63.) "It is the spirit that quickeneth." Here is the interpretation of the hard saying. "The words that I have spoken unto you are spirit and are life." We might suppose that all difficulties would vanish once it was understood that no impossible corporeal eating or drinking was intended; but in truth the saying becomes harder for us all when we face it in its full significance. That "the flesh profiteth nothing," is no matter, is the lesson which individuals and nations are set to learn by means of famine and sword, sickness and disaster. Now and then we get a glimmering of the truth when the tale of some heroic act reaches us, or when, in our worst distress, the comfort of God finds us. But, for the most part, the everyday business of our lives is carried on with the notion that we live in order to provide, for ourselves, and for "our flesh and blood," all things for the needs, or the luxuries, or the glorification of the flesh. Only a saint of God here and there, like S. Francis of Assisi, is able to realise the full measure of this saying; and probably just so far as we can understand that "the flesh profiteth nothing," whether in the way of pampering it or of mortifying it, shall we be able to comprehend what this other saying means, "it is the spirit that quickeneth." Then shall we sustain our souls in gladness upon every word of Christ: we shall eat and live, because His words "are spirit, and are life."

(v. 64.) Here we get a glimpse into the inner mind of our Lord. All the time as He walked up and down with the band of disciples, who had chosen Him as much as He had chosen them, He carried the consciousness that some would not believe, and that one should betray, and yet all the time He strove against their unbelief with human hopefulness. But now He challenges the faithless and disloyal—"but there are some of you that believe not;" He unmasked them to themselves; they were no longer to halt between two opinions; the hour of their probation had gone by.

(v. 65.) They could not respond to the final test; they were not drawn to Christ by the Father, but in seeking Him they were self-seekers. It is well for us to remember that our Lord would have from us a generous surrender as well as a loyal devotion; that he will not always be patient with our half-avowed intention to take religion seriously some day when other things are less pressing. May no sordid meanness on our part in the things of our religion add to the disappointments of Christ.

(v. 66.) Our Lord's words take effect on this occasion as when he said—"That thou doest, do quickly." He came "that the thoughts of many hearts should be revealed."¹ "Upon

this, many of His disciples went back.” They had lost all hope of preferment from One who had come to be in their eyes a mere mystic, a dreamer, incapable of even discerning the things which were of real consequence. They go back to pick up their former affairs and to make the best of this world in their own way. “And walked no more with Him.” The phrase is tender and pathetic, suggesting how “Over whose acres walked those blessed feet” in noonday heat and in the weariness of eventide, always with the following of disciples. “Walked with”—the phrase used in village life when a man and a woman choose each other and take time to know each other before the final choice for better, for worse. What a tender intimate suggestion of the disciples’ relations with our Lord! How rude and sore the desertion—a foretaste of the hour when all His disciples forsook Him and fled. “Behold and see if there be any sorrow like unto My sorrow!”

(v. 67.) “Would ye also go away?” He asks of the Twelve. Could words be more pathetic, more full of the shame and dejection of desertion?

(v. 68.) “Lord, to whom shall we go?” That Simon Peter should twice have had the honour of announcing the faith of Christendom! His faith cheers us; we are so very glad he said the words we would fain have said had we been there. “Whom have I in Heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire in comparison of Thee.” He understands with a great faith that there is but one precious thing in the world, one thing of ultimate value, and that that thing is *words*; those words of eternal life which Christ has, which Christ had just let fall to the full feeding and satisfying of one heart at any rate. “We believe and are sure that Thou art the Holy One of God.” Happy for the Twelve that they had a spokesman who saw in one flash of faith this great truth by which men live, and happy for the Apostle that he had words wherewith to comfort the sadness of Christ! We expect a cordial answer which should show that the burden was lifted somewhat from the spirit of our Master; but there are in all our lives moments of dejection so deep that comfort fails to find us; Christ answered, “Did not I choose you the Twelve, and one of you is a devil? He spake of Judas.” It is a little the fashion in our day to find extenuating circumstances until black shades off into gray, if not into spotless white; Christ speaks the terrible fact—“One of you,” not, will become, but, “is a devil.” Knowing this, our Lord suffered the man to go in and out with Him to the end; was it to give him every conceivable chance of recovery? We wonder what the effect of this saying was upon the Twelve: later on, when their training was more nearly finished, when they had learnt self-distrust and humility, each one asked, Lord, is it I? Now, perhaps, they eyed each other askance, wondering who was the “devil” in their midst.

¹ Luke i., 36.