

*Dominus Illuminatio Mea.*

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SCALE HOW "MEDITATIONS."

No. 26.

(*S. John vii., 1–13.*)

THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES.

(v. 1.) "After these things." The Evangelist covers a space of six months in this phrase in which many miracles had been performed, as the healing of the Syro-Phœnician woman's daughter, of the deaf and dumb man, the feeding of the four thousand, the restoring of the blind man at Bethsaida. Peter had made his second great confession. The three had witnessed the Transfiguration; and much teaching of the things of the kingdom had been given. The result of Christ's work was that His position had become more and more unsafe. "Jesus walked in Galilee, for He would not walk in Judea, because the Jews (*i.e.* the religious leaders of the people) sought to kill Him."

(v. 2.) "Now the feast of the Jews," etc., the feast of Tabernacles, the most popular of all the feasts, the autumn thanksgiving held in remembrance of the time when the people dwelt in tents, was at hand.

(v. 3.) "His brethren," variously surmised to be His cousins, the sons of the Virgin's sister, or the children of Joseph by a former marriage. They have followed His teaching, step by step; surely, one would say, they ought to know; and they are not convinced. It is worth while in our own family and social relations to remember this fact, lest we, too, think slight things of the worthiest amongst us. The Greatest could live amongst men and not be recognised even by His own family; they looked for signs of mastery, and He gave them signs of meekness; they looked for a ruler, and He said, "I am among you as He that serveth," and they did not know Him. [sic] and were puzzled and baffled by the signs which they saw. Still, the family credit was much to them, and they take it upon them to chide Him. "Why walk in Galilee any longer? Depart hence, and go into Judea; where are the priests and the scribes able to discern by sure signs whether a man be a prophet or no." Also it would seem that the following of Christ had decreased, and that in Judea they might again be recovered, for the brethren add, "That Thy disciples also may behold Thy works."

(v. 4.) "For no man doeth anything in secret." We see how little they had apprehended our Lord's teaching as that which is done by the right hand not being known by the left hand. They see no object in the teaching and work of Christ except as a proclamation of Himself and His personal claims. They are yet in the outer darkness of those who believe that "to get on" is the chief thing in life; to get on by fair means, if they can, but by all means to get on. Their charge against Christ appears to be that He had in no way bettered the position of Himself or His family by all the signs and wonders He had done. There is nothing more limiting to the horizon, more blinding to the inward eye, than this habit of placing personal or family advancement before us as a final aim. We feel that it is virtuous and praiseworthy to do the best we can for ourselves and for our own, and our eyes are blinded "that we see not the

truth." "If Thou doest these things."—From chiding they pass easily into scoffing and doubting. The very works they had seen with their own eyes were no longer certain to them until they had received the stamp of the world's acceptance. This is one of the dangers of pursuing the favours of the world; and here, perhaps, we have the secret of much of the light scepticism of the present day. It is not that the anguish of doubt has pierced men to the soul, but that they choose to stand well with their world by thinking in advance of the most advanced and, perhaps, flippant of their set. It is not the part of a loyal disciple to challenge Christ to "manifest Thyself to the world," to ask petulantly for a solution of the baffling problems of life, but to wait his Lord's pleasure with steadfast faith.

(v. 5.) "Even His brethren did not believe on Him." The Evangelist would appear to record the fact with sadness.

(v. 6–10.) Christ answers with the same sad irony which appears in "Sleep on now, and take your rest." Every word has grated upon Him, and every word has wounded; every word spoken by His brethren has been foreign to His nature and His aims. "My time (for convincing the world) is not yet come." The ages are still waiting for the full coming of that time, "but your time (for flattering the world, waiting the world's pleasure, living for the world's approbation) is always ready." So of us: if we live only to get on in the world, there need be no pause for recollection—we must energise continually. If we live for the service of God, we shall often have to wait long to see what God will do with us. Our time will not be always ready. "The world cannot hate you (because ye are its own, and no man hateth his own), but Me it hateth, because I testify of it that its works are evil." The very life of Christ, His goings to and fro among the people, His attitude towards men and towards God,—all this had the irritating effect of a continual protest. "Go ye up unto the feast; I go not up yet, because my time is not yet fulfilled"; and Jesus abode in Galilee, and His brethren went up to Jerusalem, no doubt joining the festal companies of their people.

(v. 10.) "But when His brethren were gone up, then went He also up, but as it were in secret." Perhaps of all the undesigned coincidences by which the faithfulness of S. John's record is established none is more striking than this—that he makes no attempt to explain an apparent contradiction; no attempt to reconcile what appear to be contradictory statements. Let us also not trouble ourselves with the effort to reconcile apparent discrepancies. Christ said, "I go not up," and yet He went up. So be it. It would be pleasant to believe that our Lord reconsidered the matter, as men do, but we are content to leave it, knowing that "He doeth all things well."

(v. 11.) "Where is He?" We are introduced to a scene of great animation, of much coming and going, of many meetings and greetings. It would be difficult to form an idea of the gay stir produced in Jerusalem at the seasons of the great feasts; especially is this true of the Feast of Tabernacles, when every house-top and every open place held leafy booths, and every man carried branches of fruits, chiefly citron. But on this occasion there is an undercurrent of intense excitement; all thoughts are turned to Christ; everyone asks of his neighbour, "Where is He?" The Jews, the leaders of the people, sought Him to take away His life. The multitude was divided in opinion; His warmest friends appear to have no very strong convictions; they seek to defend Him from charges which would prove Him to be worse than other men; that is all. "He is a good man," they say. Naturally so timorous a defence carries no weight. They who are on Christ's side must ever be aggressive, and not merely on the defensive; they must be inflamed with the ardour of those who follow a great leader. But these half-hearted defenders have their

following to-day. "He is a good man," is the feeble creed of multitudes who have never been touched with the divine passion of Christianity. Nor do these see that they are making for Christ a claim which is insupportable. If He were no more than "a good man," then may we reverently dare to say that he was not a good man. How dare any son of man but this lift up his face and say boldly, "I and my Father are one," thus making himself equal with God? There is no half-way house on the Way of Life. We must venture boldly—worship Him as our God, serve Him as our King, embrace Him as our Saviour—or Christ is nothing to us. "Not so," say the others, "but He leadeth the multitude astray." The charge is ever the same, that the religion of the Gospel gives the common people "false ideas," above all, the mischievous notion that they are of value in the eyes of God who are of no account in the eyes of men.

(v. 13.) "Howbeit no man spake openly for fear of the Jews." All this eager discussion goes on in corners and in subdued tones. The people know the mind of their rulers very well; for fear of the Jews, the leaders of religion, they dare not speak of Him who is the Way of all true religion. Not that this fear exonerates them: who knows but, if all the disciples of Christ then gathered in Jerusalem had had the courage of their convictions and had spoken out boldly all that was in their hearts, that the rulers themselves might not have listened. We are not, perhaps, called upon to proclaim our faith upon the housetops, but this, at least, is required of us—that when the occasion arises for us to speak, our words shall carry some of the passion of our convictions.