

Dominus Illuminatio Mea.

SCALE HOW "MEDITATIONS."

No. 27.

(*S. John vii., 14–24.*)

THE GREAT CONTROVERSY.

(v. 14.) Christ went to the Feast as an outlaw, waiting until the roads were free of passengers, for all had gone to Jerusalem. The Jews sought His life, and He would run no unnecessary risk; while He would avoid no duty, whatever danger might attend it. In the midst of the Feast, that is on the fourth day, Christ appeared; not in the by-ways of the city, but in the heart of danger, which was also the post of duty—"He taught in the Temple." What follows has been called the great controversy.¹ Christ stands to answer attacks from various quarters, and each attack shows a separate drift of opinion, and throws light upon the characters of the speakers.

(v. 15.) "The Jews, therefore, marvelled." "The Jews," *i.e.*, the priests, the scribes, the Pharisees, the leisured class, in fact, who gave themselves to so complete an observance of the law as was not possible for men who had to earn their living. They had all received an equivalent to a university education; they had their great schools and their famous masters and their definite courses of study, the elementary stage of which occupied a youth until his twenty-first year. They spoke with the scorn of graduates for non-graduate ministers of religion: "How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?" But they "marvelled," for that Jesus did know was plain even to their unwilling minds.

(v. 16.) Jesus answered that He did belong to a great school with the Greatest of all teachers. He was no illiterate, no empiric; He taught with authority. "My teaching is not mine, but his that sent me." Then follows one of those luminous teachings of Christ which light up the whole interior life of the individual, and which show a clear solution of the problems which are for ever baffling one or another school of thought. That Christianity is not demonstrable, and is therefore not to be received, has, from the beginning until now, been the contention of scientists, philosophers, historians. Christ accepts the postulate; Christianity is not demonstrable, but is discernable only by that inward light which every man is capable of casting upon its truths. What is that light? The honest and simple will, which our Lord has already had occasion to commend. "If any man *willeth* to do His will, he shall know of the teaching whether it be of God" (*R.V.*) Conviction in this supreme matter is of the will first, and then of the intellect. He that *willeth* shall *know*; nor is it well we should think that willing to do the will of God is the same thing as willing what we call a career of usefulness, even of self-sacrifice. "This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent."² Willing the will, like working the work, is, probably, to hold ourselves in that willing and obedient attitude of soul in which conviction is possible; to keep the single eye, to ponder upon the things of Christ, without giving place to pride of intellect, whether it be in refuting or in confirming the truth by which we live. To this attitude of soul comes faith—the free gift of God. He shall *know* of the doctrine,

know with absolute assurance. Nor is this, as some would say, a kind of mental conjuring, impossible to the honest mind which would prefer to face every doubt and every difficulty. It is thus that all our great convictions come to us. By this receptivity—the highest function of the spiritual intelligence—we know whatever we do know of the deeper meanings of life and love and eternity. It is not by his actions, or the proofs we get of his affection, that we really know a human friend. We know him when we regard him with the single eye and *will* to see him as he truly is, that is, at his best; for the law of our being is one law, whether we would discern one another or discern the Christ of God. The time comes when proofs and evidences are to be left aside as having served their purpose, and we see with that inward light which our Lord describes as the single will. “If any man *willeth* to do His will He shall *know*,” and we all know that this is true. A flash of conviction, an impulse of the higher life, will cause a man to throw over the most promising prospects and go, he knows not whither, to do, he knows not what; as Abram and Matthew, the publican, when each received his call. This, if we will believe it, is the very *crux* of Christianity: that it is not to be proven; and is yet self-proven, inevitable, to him who will receive it.

(v. 18.) “He that speaketh from himself seeketh his own glory.” Our Lord continues His refutation of that charge of the Jews, that he was a self-elected teacher, a man who had never learned. At the same time He carries on His teaching regarding the doctrine of the potent will. What was the aim of the teaching of Christ? Did He come to magnify Himself? Was self-exaltation, material, intellectual, spiritual, His object, or was He not rather the sole son of man who has ever been able to say,—“I am meek and lowly of heart?” It is only as an ambassador, honoured for his sovereign’s sake, that Christ claims confidence. “He that seeketh the glory of Him that sent Him the same is true.” Here, perhaps, is the secret of the will, impotent to believe, and to know the truth of doctrine. The intellectual arrogance, “the strife for triumph more than truth,” the sense that nothing can be, shall be, true, which is not open to proof by recognised intellectual methods, this unconscious self-glorification is a veil between even the honest and good heart and the truth which is to be discerned by quite other methods. Worse is his case who does not *will* to do the will of the Father because he has private ends of his own to accomplish, things to get and to have, a position to make, his own glory to seek. He cannot withdraw himself from himself and look at that which is invisible; he cannot know of the doctrine whether it be of God.

(v. 19.) We come to another point in the great controversy with the Jews. “Did not Moses give you the law and yet none of you doeth the law? Why seek ye to kill Me?” The law had become the sole religion of the Jews, had obscured for them the gracious vision of the Law-giver who gives laws to men as a father gives rules to his children to save them from hurtful wrong-doing. Losing the conception of the Law-giver, they lose all sense of proportion in their regard for the law and would break the sixth commandment of the moral law to punish the breach of a mere traditional gloss on the fourth.

(v. 21–24.) The Jews make no answer. The question of Christ, “Why seek ye to kill Me?” revealed the purpose they had supposed hidden; but the “multitude” of pilgrims, come up for the feast, carry on the controversy. They know nothing of the intention of the rulers, and ask “Who seeketh to kill Thee?” and taunt Christ with demoniacal possession because He has this notion—“Thou hast a devil.” Christ, in answer, pursues the controversy, which turned on the miracle of the impotent man whom He made every whit whole on the Sabbath day. “If

circumcision, an act of wounding, is lawful on the Sabbath, are ye wrath with Me because I made a man every whit whole on the Sabbath?” We seem to notice a greater tenderness and gentleness in our Lord’s words when He speaks to the multitude. They are not blinded by prejudice; they are not seeking to kill Him; they are open to conviction, and He labours with divine gentleness to make them see the truth.

(v. 24.) “Judge not according to appearances, but judge righteous judgment.” Here again our Lord appeals to that inner power of discerning truth, which all men possess, and for which all men are responsible. Appearances, proofs, evidences—how misleading they are in all things human and divine! Used in strict subordination to that power of judging, that will to do and to see, that inner witness which every man possesses, they serve their purpose; but, apart from this judging of righteous judgment, how futile they are! Our laws hold fast divine truth so far anyway that they do not convict a man upon circumstantial evidence.

¹ Cf. Westcott on S. John’s Gospel.

² S. John vi. 29.