

*Dominus Illuminatio Mea.*

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SCALE HOW "MEDITATIONS."

No. 28.

THE GREAT CONTROVERSY. (Part II.)

(*S. John vii., 25–35.*)

(v. 25–27.) "Some of them of Jerusalem." The original would perhaps correspond to such a phrase as "some Londoners." These were better informed than the multitude of pilgrims; they are aware that there is a conspiracy amongst the priests and rulers to take the life of Christ. Apparently He is in their hands, teaching openly in the Temple, and they not only do nothing, but, "they say nothing unto Him." For a moment the faith of the people in their rulers is shaken. Could it be possible that their teachers, whom they held as altogether righteous, should know that here indeed was the Messiah, and should yet seek to take away His life? But that were too infamous a thing to imagine. Was not the whole Jewish people waiting for the Coming One? How then imagine that their teachers and leaders, those who knew best amongst them, were conspiring to defraud the nation of Him who should be their Peace, and to set aside the promise of God? No, this could not be; some other explanation must be sought. It was their own ignorance of the Scripture that was in fault; the rulers knew well [sic] enough that this was not the Christ; for example, "Howbeit we know this man whence He is, but when the Christ cometh no man knoweth whence He is." The loyalty of the people to their leaders made them search for justification for their attitude towards Christ, and they appear to have had in view some such words as—"the Lord shall suddenly come to His temple": but this was no sudden coming of an unknown great One, for did they not know His father and mother, and about His home in Nazareth? So men talked in a corner; not aloud for fear of the Jews.

(v. 28–29.) But Christ, with that unerring discernment which enables Him always to answer, not mere words, but the secret thoughts of His interlocutor, perceived what was being said in this perhaps distant group of men, and "cried" to them, perhaps because they were far off, "teaching and saying;" accepting their notion of truth for as much as it was worth; not meeting their doubts with a literal exposition of the prophecies; not testifying that they did know whence the Christ should come, that the city of David was to be also the city of the Messiah, and that He, according to prophecy, was indeed born in Bethlehem. This would be evidence according to the letter, and "the letter killeth." Our Lord adopts another line of argument, raising His hearers, as always, to a higher level of thought. "Ye both know Me and know whence I am," He says, admitting their acquaintance with Him as one man knows another; but there is more to know than ye think of. I came not of myself, but "He that sent Me is true, whom ye know not." My life is not limited by the relations and circumstances that ye think ye know. I am sent to discover to you, in the only way in which you could comprehend it, Him who cannot err as you are erring now in your judgment of Me, because He is true. "Whom ye know not"—for had ye known Him, the Truth would have opened your eyes, and ye would have discerned Me also. "I know Him." "I am from Him." "He sent Me."

(v. 30.) “They sought, therefore, to take Him.” “They” probably being the rulers and their following, who watched with increasing jealousy the impression that Christ was making upon the people. “And no man laid his hand on Him, because His hour was not yet come.” It is said that every man bears a charmed life till his work is done; how much more He, whose work is the salvation of the world.

(v. 31.) “But of the multitude many believed on Him.” “The multitude,” the country people come up from the feast appear to be the most accessible of the several parties. They appear to have the candour, the openness of mind, which is the first condition of conviction. They recount the miracles that Christ had done to their knowledge; this one telling one tale of wonder, another (from Nain it may be) a more marvellous story, until the tide of conviction spread amongst them, and they said,—“When the Christ shall come, will He do more signs than those which this man hath done?” Theirs was an elementary faith founded upon signs and wonders; there is no hint that they had the spiritual insight which penetrated beneath the signs to the gracious mystery which underlay them all—the presence among men of the divine Son of God.

(v. 32). [sic] Still their conviction seems to have been sincere so far as it went, and the ever watchful Pharisees heard, with increasing hatred of their Victim, this talk amongst the people. They are not to be restrained any more by considerations of prudence, by a fear of a general rising in favour of Jesus, and by dread of the consequent interposition of the Roman power; “the chief priests and the Pharisees sent officers to take Him;” the “officers” probably whose business it was to “take” or to expel disorderly offenders from the precincts of the Temple.

(v. 33.) Christ arraigns them in turn, though they probably do not see the force of His arraignment. “Jesus therefore,” *i.e.*, because they had committed the offence against His august Person of sending against Him the officers whose concern was with the common breakers of the law, as though, to compare a lesser thing with an infinitely greater, a posse of policemen were sent to apprehend the Prince of Wales; Jesus therefore said,—“Yet a little while I am with you, and I go unto Him that sent Me.” Did ever ambassador withdraw from an unfriendly country with such sovereign dignity? But the withdrawal is complete; these words appear to mark the point when Christ ceases for the time to strive with the Jews as a nation. He foretells His speedy withdrawal to the courts of heaven whence He came.

(v. 34.) “Ye shall seek Me and shall not find Me.” The time should come, as we know it did in the seige [sic] of Jerusalem, when the rulers should bethink themselves of Christ, and should go out after many false Messiahs in the belief that each was this Jesus whom they crucified. “And where I am ye cannot come.” No, because where Christ is, is ever a condition and not a place. No change of place should remove Him from instant access to the meek and lowly of heart who come unto Him, to them who labour and are heavy-laden; but to the proud and the prejudiced, the wilful and undisciplined, to all after the kind of these Pharisees and priests, the word is still true—“Where I am ye cannot come.”

(v. 35.) Again, “The letter killeth.” The Jews could find none but a literal meaning in the words of Christ. “Whither will this Man go that we shall not find Him?” “Will He go unto the Dispersion among the Greeks?” that is, to the Jews scattered through Syria and southern Europe; those Jews to whom S. Paul first addressed himself when he entered into the cities where they were scattered. “And teach the Greeks.” We seem to hear the bitterness of scorn

with which these words are pronounced; will this outcast from among His own people carry His strange doctrine to the Gentiles? That were a fitting end for such as He. How human and living is the picture of passionate irritation we get in—“What is the word that He said? Ye shall seek Me and shall not find Me, and where I am ye cannot come.” But we perceive that the words have lodged; they repeat them with finger pointed, lips writhed in derision, but never more will they be able to forget. “Where I am ye cannot come,” will echo and re-echo henceforth in those hearts as the death-knell of the better possibilities of their lives. The controversy with the Jews, the leaders, that is, is practically closed; the final words have been spoken. If it should happen to any one of us to be in controversy with Christ at the present moment, exalting our wisdom above His wisdom, preferring our way to His way, our ends to His purposes, let us pause and consider betimes. He will not always strive with the children of men; it is possible for the final word to be spoken.