

Dominus Illuminatio Mea.

SCALE HOW "MEDITATIONS."

No. 29.

THE GREAT CONTROVERSY. (Part III.)

(S. John vii., 37–39.)

(37.) "Now on the last day, the great day of the Feast." It would appear that, while the special note of the Gospel of S. Matthew is the fulfilment of prophecy, S. John's more mystic mind was especially impressed with those discourses of our Lord in which He revealed Himself as fulfilling that which was prefigured by pictures or types, especially those types which occur during the wilderness journey of the Israelites. In S. John vi. is the discourse in which our Lord gives full interpretation to the type of manna; the water from the smitten rock, the pillar of fire by night, and the brazen serpent lifted up, all are confronted with their Antitype.

It is a question whether the last day of the Feast was the seventh day or whether it was the day of holy convocation at the end of the Feast, when the Israelites took down their tents, and when the sacrifices were more numerous, and the rejoicings even greater than throughout the Feast.

"Jesus stood and cried." The eastern teacher sat while his disciples stood: these words give the idea of a spontaneous, irrepressible appeal, urgent, impassioned; the days of Christ's ministry were drawing to a close, and they "would not come unto Him that they might be saved." We must read the words that follow in connection with a custom peculiar to the Feast of Tabernacles. When the morning sacrifices were laid upon the altar, a priest went to the Pool of Siloam with a golden ewer, which he filled, and returned by the Water Gate. As he approached the altar, he did so through ordered ranks of the people in their best attire, each holding the *lûlâb* (*i.e.* bunch of green boughs) in one hand and the citron fruit in the other. As he ascended the steps the trumpets blew a triumphant blast, and the people shouted; then the water was poured into a silver basin. At night the people met again to rejoice over this ceremony of water-bearing, men and women, in the Women's Court; and a Jewish proverb runs, "He who has never seen the rejoicing at the pouring out of the water of Siloam has never seen rejoicing in his life." We who read wonder how much this imagery meant to the Jews. They knew how Moses struck the rock twice, and the living water gushed out, and the stream followed the people through their wilderness journey. They knew how the prophets had again and again made reference to this living water,—"Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters."¹ No doubt they understood in a dim way that this living water imaged the Messias who should come; though perhaps they did not understand in the fulness of S. Paul's later teaching,— "They drank of that spiritual Rock which followed them, and that Rock was Christ."²

"If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink." And now the crowded congregation in the Temple hear amazing words, words fitly described by those "officers" when

they say, "never man so spake." If any man, anywhere, through all the world, at any time, throughout the ages, if *any* man thirst, if any man is faint and weary, exhausted, or feverish, in his journey through this troublesome world, let him come unto Me, saith Christ, and drink. We in western climes have, for the most part, never thirsted, and have no conception of the utter satisfaction, the complete rehabilitation that comes of drinking. It is in their thirst men realise that there is but one thing to drink in the world, whether we get our water from the udder of the cow, or from the juice of the grape, however we flavour it and adulterate it, or whether we drink it pure and fresh from the spring. There is but one satisfaction for this most intense of our physical needs, as there is but one draught for that parching thirst of the spirit of which Christ, who knows all things, testifies. "I drank, drank, drank," says one who was athirst, "one can of water after another; I felt how the thick blood again flowed easily through my veins; how my hands, which were before shrivelled up like pieces of wood, swelled; how my skin became moist and perspired, how my whole body received new life and new strength." Such is the joy of drinking, drinking, when one is a prey to thirst. There is a worse thirst than this of the body;—when all vital forces seem to have collapsed; when one would fain, like the child Ishmael, lie down and die; when nothing seems worth while; when to do the same thing, to see the same objects, day after day, palls on our very soul; when the people we know are a weariness; when life is arid; when discontent and despondency, or drearier indifference, or burning anxiety, or the fever of excitement or dissipation, fall upon us,—then, we thirst. We do not know what ails us. Change of friends or change of scene, money or leisure, hold for us, so we think, the satisfaction we need. But if our spirit be finely touched, we find in these only passing alleviations [sic]; the thirst comes on us again; for it is indeed that divine discontent to which the psalmist gives voice,—“My soul is athirst for God, for the living God.” It is because He knows of this thirst of all men everywhere, and because He knows that in Himself is the divine fulness of life which is the only satisfaction for the thirsting souls of men, that Christ, thirsting also for men as they thirst for Him, with great love and desire, cries aloud—“If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink.” It is only in the drinking, the personal appropriation, that full satisfaction comes, and “our peace flows as a river.” Never before and never since in the history of the world has such a proffer been made to mankind. Only He who is named by the highest Name could, without the extremity of blasphemous folly, make such an offer to a fainting world. Is it mystical, not to be understood by plain people who rely upon their common sense? On the contrary, here again, the law of our life is one law. The satisfaction Christ offers is, in kind, like that refreshment of spirit which we can occasionally give to one another; but in degree it differs; for it is infinite, complete, eternal; and not for one or two, or half-a-dozen, but for all. We weary ourselves with the shows of things and shrink from the very bliss of a plunge into the real.

(v. 38.) “He that believeth on Me.” “Believing” is used as synonymous with drinking,—unreserved acceptance. “As the Scripture hath said.” The reference appears to be to the rock in the wilderness, and to all subsequent teaching founded upon that story. “Out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.” He who drinks shall himself be as a spring in the desert, flowing freely and unconsciously, and in its turn satisfying the thirst of all comers. The figure appears to point to the natural Christian life, and not to any effort of preaching or teaching. Perhaps a certain hopefulness and gladness and freshness of living, a sparkle as of spring water, is especially characteristic of Christian people.

(v. 39.) “But this spake He of the Spirit.” The Evangelist appears to think that this saying asks for interpretation. This outflow of life was to take place after the day of Pentecost, when the Spirit of Christ should descend upon the disciples of Christ. We begin to understand when, for the outflow of living water, we substitute the more familiar “fruits of the Spirit”—love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, meekness, goodness, temperance. “Jesus was not yet glorified.” The immediate glorification was that of the cross—“I, if I be lifted up.”

¹ Isaiah lv. i.

² 1. Cor. x., 4.