

SCALE HOW "MEDITATIONS."

Dominus Illuminatio Mea.

No. 13.

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER.

(S. John, chapter iv.)

May 8th, 1898.

(v. 1, 4.) We now come to one of the most interesting "introductions" given us in the Gospels. We hear now of our Lord's second visit to Galilee. He journeyed, partly that there might be no apparent rivalry between Himself and the Baptist, passing through the hostile country of Samaria, with its mixed Jewish and Babylonian race, between whom and the Jews there was undying hatred, for those whose help we refuse will hinder. The distance to Galilee through Samaria is probably a two or three days' walk.

(v. 6.) The well of Sychar is still shown, and there can scarcely be a more sacred place, for this is one of the few spots that can really be identified. Our Lord, being weary with His journey, sat, "as He was," beside the well. The note of humanity is very interesting; and the hour of noon corresponds with an idea of weariness and thirst.

(v. 7.) We may imagine the scene: the woman coming, poor, as the richer classes did not bear their own water, with bold rather handsome face behind her veil, and when our Lord said, not to open conversation, but because He was thirsty, "Give Me to drink," dipping her vessel into the deep well; and we may imagine the pleasant gurgle of the water, His own creature, yet He would work no miracle for Himself, and relied on this woman's services. We are never told that she gave the water: we trust that she did, for the Christian feels envious of her privileges; but "inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these ... ye have done it unto Me."

(v. 8.) The Jews could eat but little that Samaritans had touched, without defilement, but the disciples could buy such as eggs or fruit.

(v. 9.) Considering the nature of the woman and the feeling of the times, the woman's reply is comprehensible though churlish; she would know our Lord as a Jew by His dress.

(v. 10.) Mark the difference between the divine character of our Lord, and this neither "nice" nor virtuous woman. We, when we receive a churlish answer, feel sore, think "they are not capable of understanding," yet our Lord gave His best and deepest teaching to her, pouring it out as to His nearest disciples. We are never told to "cast our pearls before swine," but our Lord saw that there was good ground in her heart in which the seed might grow an hundredfold. Jesus "answered" not her question, but what was within, the thirst lying behind her flippant passionate nature and life of sin; thus the parable came to Him of the pure refreshing water and her need of just the same influence. "The Gift of God" is life eternal, to know Thee the one true God, Christ Himself.

(v. 11.) We see the anxiety of the Samaritans [sic] to claim their Jewish origin and ownership of this well of running living waters, which is still a great possession, though its

waters run only in winter. The woman was impressed by the manner and face of our Lord, and her memory wandered back to Moses, who *had* brought water from the rock, and the saying “A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you like unto me.” Her attention is challenged, she thinks.

(v. 13, 14.) Again Jesus answers the thought of her heart:—No, I am not going to strike a rock or open another fountain, but the water of life shall prevent the thirst of famine, and give the “hunger and thirst after righteousness,” which is blessed.

(v. 15.) The hot barren places of the woman’s heart would indeed “desire the water-brooks,” and yet she returns to her old flippant way, asking for a miracle to prove Him a prophet and not a dreamer of dreams; in a practical spirit, thinking of cares and fatigues, and ignoring any spiritual aspect; irritable, as people often are if their conscience and heart begin to be touched without being fully awakened.

(v. 16.) This was “a sign” to show the woman that He knew all about her, that she might not slip back into materialism. And here we come to the woman’s grain of sincerity and truth, which drew Christ to her.

(v. 17.) She acknowledges the faults of her life, showing herself to be a woman little to be respected.

(v. 18.) Our Lord had sifted the grain of gold from the chaff: “thou hast said truly.” The law of divorce was then very lax among the Jews, and this woman was probably “not easy to get on with;” thus she had sunk into sin. All our relationships with parents, family and friends, are known to our Master, and He notes every sweet, kind, good and pleasant thing in our relationships; Himself the living Father and the tender Brother, ever ready with sympathy and compassion.

(v. 19, 20.) We see that the woman is now convinced; she has been trying “to make our Lord out,” and is rewarded for her pains. Yet she tries to turn the conversation by bringing up the great controversy between Jews and Samaritans.

(v. 21.) The hour came, when at the crucifixion the veil of the Temple was rent in twain; for God has His times and seasons, and “our times” for our country and ourselves are in His hands.

(v. 22.) This is aimed straight at popular tolerance. There is none of the laxity with Christ, which says—

“For rival creeds let priests and zealots fight,
He can’t be wrong whose life is in the right.”

If we consider it the same to be a Samaritan or a Jew, and held religion to be a matter of climate and nationality, we should be exonerated from all missionary efforts, or desire to teach.

(v. 24.) But our Lord does not think deep teaching too good for this woman. The Jews worshipped in truth as formalists, but “God is a Spirit,” and we must by teaching and thought have right ideas of God, that we may worship Him in spirit and in truth. Our Lord knew that no thought is too deep for any human being if it is only put in the right way.

(v. 25.) That spiritual hunger has now been awakened in her heart, she wants to know and understand, to see the Messiah (for the Samaritans had five books of the Old Testament and knew these prophecies) who will “declare all things.”

(v. 26.) He that seeketh, findeth; who knocketh, is opened unto. Our Lord makes His first great revelation of Himself, saying "I am He" to this woman, honouring her in her need, who gave but a cup of cold water, yet received this revelation. If the Bible were not an inspired book we should here have descriptions of her sensations and wonder, but with divine reticence we hear nothing of all this.

(v. 27.) A Jewish woman would never have thus talked to a stranger. "Rebekah at the well" is a type of modesty, and the disciples marvelled at this conversation with an evidently bold woman, but they revered their Master too much to dream of interference.

(v. 28.) She was so interested now that she had forgotten the things of the world, as we are sometimes permitted in prayer to do when we forget intercession in thanksgiving.

(v. 29, 30.) We see the woman's character in her saying this "to the men," and we gather that she believed in her heart, yet feared to draw down their ridicule upon her. Because the salient feature of her life had been seized upon, she felt that her whole life was known, and she spoke with such conviction that the men went that long way to Christ. This sinner was the first woman-missionary.

(v. 31.) We return to Christ, whose disciples would minister if they might. We say of our interests that they are "meat and drink to us," and this is what Christ says: "My meat and drink are to do the will of Him that sent Me." Another indication that not Christ alone laboured to bring back men to the peace of His kingdom, but "God so loved the world," etc., and to each is given the privilege of doing some little of the work Christ came to do.

(v. 35.) Our Lord was then "waiving the first-fruits of the barley harvest," rejoicing, with the joy of the harvest, over the soul of this woman and looking forward to the great ingathering of souls.

(v. 36, 38.) We never know who has sown or who may reap. We may sow the seed of an idea, or reap its harvest in action and character. The Prophets had sown, and apparently their seed was scattered to the wind, but the fact that some minds were ready to respond to Christ was because they had sown that He and the Church hereafter might reap.

(v. 39–42.) We see the successful work of the woman, and read that one of the most beautiful and precious names of Christ, "*Salvator Mundi*," was given Him by those whom the Jews thought of as outcasts.