

SCALE HOW "MEDITATIONS."

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*Dominus Illuminatio Mea.*

No. 21.

CHRIST, THE BREAD OF LIFE.

I.

(*S. John vi., 22–28.*)

We have already considered our Lord in the light of our Providence in destitution and in danger; and by this teaching the Evangelist has prepared the way for a broader, fuller, revelation. The instinct of the human soul who is beginning to know our Lord is to seek Him in emergencies of danger and of necessity, and the most comforting stories of the feeding of the five thousand and the stilling of the tempest bring us the assurance that no cry "out of the depths" will fail to reach His ear and enlist His help. But the Evangelist is about to unfold a fuller teaching: he will show us Christ not only as our Saviour in our great occasions, but as the sole and continuous Sustenance of man.

(v. 22.) "On the morrow," etc., *i.e.*, the morrow after the teaching and feeding of the five thousand, the night of which had been spent in peril of storm by the disciples on the lake. "The multitude": He Himself, we are told, sent the multitude away,<sup>1</sup> but either they had returned to the scene of the miracle or had returned to Bethsaida, on the other side of the Sea of Galilee, the scene of the miracle. They are perplexed, apparently, for they had seen how Jesus sent His disciples away in the only boat there, and had not entered it Himself, and yet He was not to be found.

(v. 23.) Meantime other boats had come from Tiberias, drawn thither, no doubt, by reports of the wonder which had been performed. "After the Lord had given thanks." It is interesting to observe that this is the single note of the miracle which the Evangelist thinks it well to preserve. Plainly the giving of thanks did not seem to him formal or accidental, but as the essential feature of the miracle; that is, he saw that in this, as in all things, Christ was in continual co-operation with the Father, and more, was in continual appreciation of, and gratitude for, the Father's intervention. It is worth while to ask ourselves why Christ gave thanks. The simple and obvious answer, because He felt thankful, will perhaps make our hearts condemn us as among the unthankful and the evil who do not inherit the Kingdom of God. Even though "thank God" arise in our hearts spontaneously a hundred times a day, we still feel that our recognition lags behind the continual mercies of our God. Perhaps after our study of this discourse at Capernaum we may realise a little more the meaning of "life" and the meaning of "bread," and that "grace before meat," which is apt to be a mocking formality, may become to us very full of meaning and very full of praise. All our happiness, whether in a bright day, or a true friend, or joyous work, must have its complementary expression—the "thank God" ever burning as a duly trimmed lamp in our hearts. But we act as spoiled children, unthankful less from want of heart than from want of thought. Let us pull ourselves up and consider, and not

fail in that responsive thankfulness which is the recognition of the Giver behind the gift.

(v. 24.) So, after a vain search for Jesus and His disciples, “they themselves got into the boats from Tiberias and came to Capernaum,” already known as our Lord’s own city, “seeking Jesus.”

(v. 25.) They find the Master, and there is in their question the sort of petulant [sic] reproach which a crowd will feel itself at liberty to bestow on the favourite of the hour: “Rabbi, when camest Thou hither?”

(v. 26.) “Jesus answered.” Another of those marvellous answers, which are no reply to the words which have been spoken, but are a sudden unveiling as by a search-light of the thoughts of the hearts of the speakers. Christ knew that they had been seeking Him and He shows them why—“not because ye saw signs, but because ye ate of the loaves.” Once again, does not our heart condemn us? We, too, seek Christ, not because we see signs of things ineffable in the daily occurrences and surroundings of our lives, but because we have eaten of the loaves—of His comfort and help and satisfaction hitherto—and we have present needs which we bring before Him. But we need not reproach ourselves: This, too, is right and belongs to the prayer which He taught us—“give us this day our daily bread,” and thereby give us satisfaction for every need of body, soul, and spirit. It is the part of children to go to their father on all their occasions and in all their distresses. The multitude had not done amiss, and because they had done thus much our Lord judges them ready to learn of the greater and deeper things which were yet to be done. They had seen the sign, but had not understood the thing signified. The sign itself was a sufficiently good thing for them: just as all the bread of comfort and water of refreshment which we find on our way is apt to be enough for us. We do not look deeper and ask, What does it all mean?

(v. 27.) Eastern sages and Western philosophers alike have ever reserved their deepest esoteric teachings for the inner few, the chosen disciples who have followed them through the labyrinth of their teaching. Not so does Christ. He offers to a multitude, with no characteristic except that they sought Him,—and sought Him, as He Himself declares, for a less worthy reason,—teaching which penetrates beyond the things seen and temporal to the things unseen and eternal. They are to “work not for the meat which perisheth, but for the meat which abideth unto eternal life.” This unlearned multitude is brought face to face with the two great problems of our being—What is life? and, What is meat? And very fit it is that these questions should be brought before the multitude, for every man born into the world finds some solution which satisfies himself, and upon his answers depend the manner of man he is and will become. The answer of Christ was found a “hard saying,” not only by the multitude, but by many of His disciples. It is still found a hard saying, and divides not only the world but the Church into two camps—those who can and those who cannot receive it. The meaning to us of the blessed Sacrament, the sign and, so far as it is truly the sign, the vehicle of that substance which is the life, depends upon our apprehension of Life and Meat. And because we will not fully understand, this Sacrament of peace has been; [sic] to the Church the standard round which perpetual contention has raged. The answer of Christ may be “hard,” but though philosophers and men of science have sought from the beginning into the sources and meaning of the mystery of life, no other answer has been found. Our Lord has spoken the last word. He is the Life and He is the Bread. What, then, of the endless forms which life assumes, from the hyssop that groweth upon the wall to the cedar of Lebanon, from the insect flitting in the

summer sun to the ox upon whose flesh human life is nourished? The developments are many and individual, but the principle of life is one: the scientific and the ignorant agree in this; all recognize a quality in all living things to which they can give no name but that of life; for which they can discern no cause; for which principle they are able to discern that disease and decay are only a means of liberation. Our carnal and material minds are willing to receive it that all life is derived from God, as a gift is derived from a giver, but we shrink from the thought that all life is a manifestation of the very Life of God. Perhaps we shall approach to some realisation of the meaning of the mystery of those outward and visible signs—the bread which is made from the *living* seed, the wine which is crushed from the *living* fruit—when we perceive why these things sustain even our bodily life. All the life that we have, of whatever sort, is the life of Christ, and in proportion as we realise that which is least, we shall perceive, however dimly, that which is greatest, and every eating of bread and drinking of wine will become to us, in a lesser degree, sacramental.

But life, like the tabernacle in the wilderness, has its three courts. There is the outer court where living things blossom and bear fruit, eat and drink, and sleep and play; and this life is holy, and disease and fever do not extinguish, but liberate the principle of life. There is the Holy place where not all living beings walk, but only mankind, because men are able to think and to love; this life also is sustained upon Christ, who is our Life. Within, there is the Holy of Holies, where man communicates with God and consciously receives in Christ the life of his spirit.

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<sup>1</sup> Mark vi., 45.