



LESSON IX.—FEBRUARY 26.

The Miracle of the Loaves and Fishes.

John vi., 1-14

Golden Text.

I am the living bread which came down from heaven. John vi., 51.

Commit verses 11, 12.

Home Readings.

Monday, Feb. 20.—John vi., 1-14.
 Tuesday, Feb. 21.—John vi., 15-24.
 Wednesday, Feb. 22.—John vi., 25-34.
 Thursday, Feb. 23.—John vi., 35-46.
 Friday, Feb. 24.—John vi., 47-58.
 Saturday, Feb. 25.—Mark viii., 1-10.
 Sunday, Feb. 26.—I. Kings xvii., 10-16; II. Kings iv., 42-44.

(By Davis W. Clark.)

Crucial times had come. John Baptist was martyred. Prudence suggested retirement. Weariness demanded it. The retreat would also afford the apostles an opportunity to report more minutely to the Master the experiences of their trial-trip, two and two, through Galilee, from which they had just returned. So the boat which had been chartered for Jesus and 'waited upon him' was employed to put the weary toilers beyond the reach of the multitudes that pressed upon them even at meal-times.

Headwinds probably drove the little bark near shore and retarded its progress. Clamdestine as the departure had been it failed of its purpose. An ever-augmenting throng hurried around the head of the lake, and probably apprised some pilgrim caravans to the Passover of the coming of the great Nazarene. So when Jesus' boat ran its keel upon the pebbly shore, there stood five thousand men, not to mention the women and children.

So far from being irritated by the failing of his plans, Jesus' heart was touched to pity at the sight of the shepherdless flock, and he began at once to instruct them in many phases of the doctrine of grace. In the absorbing interest of the theme neither Teacher nor the taught observed how the sun was dipping to the western horizon.

But the commissary of the apostolic college suddenly awoke to the situation. Five regiments and no stores on hand or any country to forage upon! After some questions on Jesus' part, calculated to test his disciples' faith, but to which they responded with phenomenal obtuseness, he proposes to work what, in some respects, was his most remarkable and significant miracle.

The material basis of the miracle was paltry in the extreme,

But one poor fisher's rude and scanty store
 Is all He asks (and more than needs),
 Who men and angels daily feeds.

There is a vivid, descriptive touch in the Greek which does not appear in our version. Under Jesus' direction the confused throng was resolved into the order of a French 'parterre.' He had them sit platwise, so that they looked, in their high-colored garments, like veritable flower-beds with green turf intervening.

After the cheerful grace, which Jesus never omits, he puts a morsel of bread and fish in the hand of each apostle, and sends him forth to serve. What each breaks off is larger far than what remains. But that which remains is undiminished. And all are fed and filled. As a lesson in frugality, the unused fragments are ordered to be gathered up. Each hesitating apostle holds in his hands the tangible evidence of the reality and magnitude of the miracle wrought.

Even a casual reader of the Bible will hardly fail to note that St. John has a philosophy of his own, in accordance with which he arranges the facts, miracles, and discourses of

Jesus. He does not do violence to chronology, but he is not hampered by it. His purpose is to show the evolution of Jesus' character and work in the most effective way possible. The material is vast and bewildering. In fine hyperbole John exclaims that if all the things that Jesus said and did were recorded the world would not contain the books that would be written. Selection is necessary. To this end he makes choice of scenic incidents and the sermons which they evoked. So follow in order the first and second miracles at Cana, the conversations of Jesus with the woman and Nicodemus, the miracle of healing at Bethesda, and of feeding beside the sea. Nothing could be more spirited! There is a philosophic continuity which is far more effective than a bald, chronological one could possibly be.

LIGHTS ON THE LESSON.

Lovely evidence is here of the implicit confidence which maintained between Jesus and his apostles. They came to him. They told him what they had done, what they had taught. They were sure of his sympathy. If they needed correction, they knew it would be done in love.

The eldest disciples have no monopoly, however, of Jesus' sympathy. He is touched with a feeling for us, too. We can come to him also, to 'tell Jesus' is still the disciples' blissful recourse.

The same considerateness which Jesus showed for the health and comfort of his toilers, he still feels for those who in this latter day are engaged in his service. Seasons of respite are indispensable for the highest effectiveness. A Church imitates the Master when it gives an industrious pastor a vacation. It says, 'Go apart, and rest a while.'

But apostles nor preachers have a monopoly of Jesus' sympathy. It sweeps out to inclose all sorts and conditions of men. Jesus was as compassionate toward the five thousand as toward the twelve. So his heart goes out toward the great unchurched masses to-day.

This boy went into partnership with Jesus. His little store was not taken from him by force. The moment he heard the Master had need he came running, and exclaiming, 'Lord, if you can use these, you are welcome to them.' With a boy's lunch Jesus fed five thousand. Young people have talents the Master can employ to-day. General Booth says, 'Shake the napkin at every corner!' The hidden 'pounds' will be sure to roll out.

Five crackers and two dried herring—talk of feeding five thousand with them! But add to the crackers and fish the almightiness of Jesus, and the proposition ceases to be ridiculous. The resources of the Church for spiritual sustenance for the thousand millions of earth are palpably inadequate, until the Saviour's power and blessing are added to the equation. Then there is enough and to spare.

The heavenliness of this miracle is evident in its orderliness. There was no unseemly scramble, inequality, or waste. All was precision, method, order.

NOTES FROM THE COMMENTARIES.

The Sea of Galilee: Sweet water, full of fish; a surface of sparkling blue, tempting down breezes from above, bringing forth breezes of her own, the Lake of Galilee is at once food, drink and air, a rest to the eye, coolness in the heat, and escape from a crowd, and a facility of travel very welcome in so exhausting a climate.—George Adam Smith. When Jesus then lifted up his eyes; Better as in the American Revision, 'Jesus therefore lifting up his eyes.' Saw a great company come ['seeing that a great multitude cometh']: Not the same crowd mentioned in verse 2, else in the Greek the article would have been inserted, but a Passover caravan coming from some other direction.—Dods. Saith unto Philip: Why to Philip? Not because he happened at the moment to be nearest to Jesus (Alford); nor as Bengel suggests, because he had charge of the commissariat; but Cyril is right who finds the explanation in the character of Philip, and in the word to prove him.—Expositor's Greek Testament. This was not a trial of Philip's faith, but a test whether he could suggest any expedient; and the answer of the disciple (verse 7) conveys also the impression that he knew of none.—Meyer. What he would do: Without suggestions from others. It was not bread he sought from Philip, but faith.—Augustine. Philip's home was Bethsaida. He was therefore acquainted with the region and people.—Peloubet. Jesus takes it for granted that they must all dine with him.—Henry. This is the

only action in Jesus' life recorded by all the evangelists.—Ibid. Make the men sit down: This was like sending Providence to market.—Ibid. Philip answered: A matter-of-fact man, quick reasoner, good man of business, more ready to rely on his own shrewd calculations than on unseen resources. This weakness Jesus gives him the opportunity of conquering.—Dods. Two hundred pennyworth—\$32. It was equivalent to his asking, 'Can he furnish a table in the wilderness?'—Henry. A lad, five loaves, two fishes: When Count Zinzendorf was a boy at school he founded amongst his school-fellows a little guild which he called the 'Order of the Grain of Mustard-seed,' and thereafter that seedling grew into the great tree of the Moravian Brotherhood, whose boughs were a blessing to the world.—Farrar. Make the men ['people'] sit down: An order indicative of our Lord's design that there might be no confusion and that the attention of all might be directed to what he was about to do.—Butler. It invited close inspection. Given (1) that there might be no unseemly crowding round him and crushing out the weaker; and (2) that they might understand they were to have a full meal, not a mere bite they could take in their hand in passing. Obedience to the request tested the faith of the crowd.—Dods. Observe the furniture of the dining-room; there was much grass there; served as cushions for those who sat upon the ground.—Henry. Jesus took the loaves: The distribution was with thanksgiving and universal satisfaction.—Ibid. Fragments: The grant we have of God's good creatures is large and full, but with the proviso, willful waste only excepted.—Ibid. This was for these Orientals a most important lesson in thrift. The poor are proverbially thriftless everywhere; but nothing could exceed the lavish wastefulness of the poor Oriental when a moment of good fortune has filled his hands with plenty. He absolutely takes no thought for the morrow, and, if reminded of the coming day, will calmly reply, 'The Lord will provide.'—Ewing. This has been noticed as a strong mark of truth, most unlikely to have been invented by the writer of a fiction. For it is improbable, from a human point of view that one who could multiply food at will should give directions about saving fragments.—Cambridge Bible.

C. E. Topic.

Sunday, Feb. 26.—Topic—Heroes of home missions: what they teach us. Jer. i., 7-19.

Junior C. E. Topic.

THE GOLDEN CALF.

Monday, Feb. 20.—Aaron's sin. Ex. xxxiii., 1-16.

Tuesday, Feb. 21.—As God saw it. Ex. xxxii., 7-10.

Wednesday, Feb. 22.—Moses's prayer. Ex. xxxii., 11-14.

Thursday, Feb. 23.—Moses and the golden calf. Ex. xxxii., 15-20.

Friday, Feb. 24.—Aaron's excuse. Ex. xxxii., 21-24.

Saturday, Feb. 25.—The punishment. Ex. xxxii., 25-35.

Sunday, Feb. 26.—Topic—A story of a golden calf. Ex. xxxii., 1-6, 15-20.

Christian Graces.

Christ never said much in mere words about the Christian graces. He lived them, he was them. Yet we do not merely copy him. We learn his art by living constantly with him, like the old apprentices with their masters. He says 'Follow Me . . . and you will find rest.' Perhaps if we knew how much was involved in the simple 'learn' of Christ, we would not enter his school with so irresponsible a heart. For there is not only much to learn, but much to unlearn. Many persons never go to this school at all until character has almost taken on its fatal set. But it can be done—and there is Rest in the school although there is also much Work.—Henry Drummond.

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