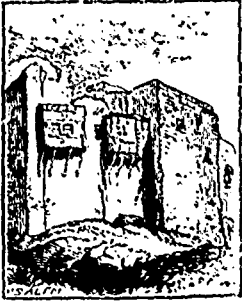


THE FEEDING OF FIVE THOUSAND.

READ MATTHEW XIV. 13-21.



WHEN we are in sorrow, especially for the loss of a friend, we naturally wish for retirement. Jesus, as man, had all the feelings of the human heart, except sin. Probably it was partly because He wished to mourn in private for John that He now went apart into a desert place.

But it was also perhaps because His hour was not yet come, and He would not needlessly expose Himself to danger. The wicked king who had killed John, and who thought that Jesus was John risen from the dead, might now put forth his hand against our Lord; so Jesus withdrew Himself.

But it was not easy for Him to be in retirement. The people, hearing where He was, followed Him on foot from their homes. We should not have been surprised to read of Jesus telling them that He wished to be alone, and that this was no time for them to come to Him. A mere man, though a kind one, would very likely have done so. Grief is apt to be selfish. People in sorrow sometimes give way too much, wrap themselves in their grief, and shut themselves up from the claims of others on them. In this, as in all things, Jesus is a pattern for us. He went forth at once from His retirement; and when He saw the multitude, many of them bringing their sick to be healed, He "was moved with compassion toward them, and He healed their sick." It is always happiest, as well as best, to follow Christ. In times of depression and sorrow, to do something for others is often a great relief.

By this time the day was drawing to a close, and the people were far from home. How should their wants be supplied in such a place? Here we see the difference between man's compassion and God's. The disciples were not unkind toward the multitude, they did not wish them to suffer. Let them go into the neighbouring villages and buy themselves bread; this was what *they* proposed. When a case of distress is brought before us, are we not sometimes too ready to rid ourselves of the difficulty in the way that will give us least trouble? It was easy for the disciples to say, "Send the multitude away;" but that was but poor help. Not such the help which Jesus gave, or the compassion which He felt. "They need not depart," He said, "give ye them to eat." The disciples were for getting rid of them; Jesus would supply their need.

But how could He, in such a place as that? There was no difficulty with Him. Five loaves and two fishes, in His hands, proved sufficient to feed five thousand men. When we are in want or difficulty, let us not doubt that He is able to give us what we need. Though He does not now appear in the midst of us, and work outward miracles, yet all power is His still. Those who seek Him will still find their

wants supplied. No outward means may appear, yet He who is Lord of all will never be at a loss for means.

And if He both can and will supply our bodily wants, He will certainly not leave our souls unfed. We may be placed in the most unfavourable circumstances, in a very desert as to religious advantages, yet our Lord can feed us in the wilderness, and bless even the smallest means to the good of our souls.

Before He brake the loaves He looked up to heaven and gave thanks. Let us not eat of what God provides for us without first thanking Him for it. Every time the table is spread, though it be but with the plainest food, God gives us a fresh gift.

How abundant was the supply! "They did all eat, and were filled." All those five thousand, and their women and children too, not only ate, but ate enough. There was no hunger or want remaining. So complete is the work of Christ in all things! So full and bountiful is God's supply for the wants of both soul and body!

Yet must there be no waste. Though He was there, who could by His almighty power increase the provision without limit, yet the fragments must be gathered up, nothing must be lost. God gives enough, but He would have us waste nothing that He has given, not even a crust of bread. Much, it is to be feared, is wasted through carelessness. But see how carefully this broken bread was gathered up, and that by Christ's command. In like manner would He have us gather up the fragments, not only of bread and meat, but also of our *time* and opportunities.

How much came of this gathering! No less than twelve baskets full of fragments; far more than what there had been at first. This would go far towards feeding the multitude again. Before, they were fed by a miracle, now by means of thrift and care; but both times by the gift of Christ. Even so does God supply our wants variously; sometimes without any labour of ours, sometimes by means of our own care and pains. But however our food comes, let God be praised for it, for it comes from Him.

F. B.

TURN BACK A LITTLE WAY.

If thou hast passed an aching heart,
Turn back a little way;
Let not "thy giving" be a part
To act another day.

Give, whilst the weary eye is dim;
And if a tear should fall,
'Twill be in gratitude to Him
Who heard the mourner's call.

When thy "to-morrows" all have died,
Kind actions will appear,
Like angels waiting at thy side,
To bless thee, and to cheer.

Then, in the charities of life
This impulse still obey,
And if thou passed an aching heart,
Turn back a little way.

Charles Scrain.