

attitude toward Betty and her boy. Was it because Betty had been there to pray, showing a new side to her character? Hardly. It had been a "business" visit. Betty had been strictly "on the make," and she had interrupted her beautiful meditation. Still, she had shown her the statue of the Sacred Heart. How like a vision it had looked, looming out of the Cloud. Yes, Betty had shown her what the Divine Cloud conceals. She had shown her God, as humanity alone can see Him, in His Sacred Humanity.

The old nun lowered her voice. "No man hath at any time seen God," she said softly, "but anyone who comes up against his fellow-man can see His Christ."

"It was what the medieval mystics would have called a 'showing.' She had challenged our Lord to explain things, and here was the explanation. Betty had shown her the Sacred Heart, and incidentally, the Sacred Heart was showing her Betty, Betty and her 'old beau,' God bless them."

"My friend sat there thinking it out, slowly and reverently. Yes, they were the thoughts which we call distracting, which come as duties across our path, that show us God, the things which would seem to obliterate Him. She listened rather than thought. It had all become so clear and simple, and consoling."

"By this we know that we abide in Him, if we love one another. When she came out of the Cathedral she glanced up at the sky. It was bright and starry—the kind of sky that the Psalmist, and other spiritual people, have become rapt in contemplating."

"Thank God," she said to herself. "It will be fine for Chertsey."

"Well, I declare, I have timed myself well," the old Sister said. "Here is Victoria Station."—Enid Dinnis in the Magnificat.

THE STORY OF CHRIST

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BREAD AND FISHES

On two occasions there was a multiplication of bread, alike in all details except the proportions of the quantities involved,—that is, in exactly what gave them their real spiritual meaning.

Thousands of poor people had followed Jesus into a place in the wilderness, far from any settlements. For three days they had not eaten, so hungry were they for the bread of life which is His word. But on the third day, Jesus took pity on them—there were women and children among them—and ordered His disciples to feed the multitude. But they had only a little bread and a few fishes, and there were thousands of mouths. Then Jesus had them all sit down on the ground on the green grass, in circles of fifty to a hundred, He blessed the small amount of food they had; all were satisfied, and baskets of the broken pieces were left.

The less there is of the true bread, the bread of truth, the more it satisfies. The old law is abundant, copious, divided into innumerable sections. There are hundreds of precepts written in the books and thousands more invented by the Scribes and Pharisees. At first sight it seems a gigantic table where a whole race could be satisfied. But all these precepts, these rules and formulas are only dry leaves, shavings, trash. One can live on such fare. The more numerous they are, the less they satisfy. Humble and simple people cannot satisfy their hunger for justice with these innumerable but indelible viands. Instead, one Word alone sums up all the words and transcends the petrified bigotry beloved by the complacent and satiated; one Word which cleanses the soul, which reconciles hearts, which calms the hunger for justice; the multitudes will be satisfied and there will be enough to eat also for those who were not present on that day. Spiritual bread is in itself miraculous. A loaf of wheat bread is only enough for a very few, and when they have finished it, there is no more for any one! But the bread of truth, that mystic bread of joy is never finished, can never be finished. Give it out to thousands and it is always there; distribute it to millions, and it is always intact. Every one has taken his part as the men and women in the wilderness did, and as much as was given out, so much more remains for those who are to come.

Another day when the disciples found themselves without bread, Jesus admonished them to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees. And the disciples, almost always slow to understand Him, said among themselves, "It is because we have taken no bread." Which when Jesus perceived he said unto them, "O ye of little faith, why reason ye among yourselves, because ye have brought no bread? Do ye not yet understand neither remember the five loaves of the five thousand and how many baskets ye took up? Neither the seven loaves of the four thousand and how many baskets ye took up? How is it that ye do not understand that I speak it not to you concerning bread, that ye should beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees?" That is, of the blind guardians of the degenerate law.

They are the Twelve, the chosen, the best, the faithful, and yet they cannot understand at once, do not sufficiently believe.

Again in the boat, the night of the tempest, Jesus was obliged to reproach them. The Master had gone to sleep in the stern, His head on the pillow of one of the rowers. Suddenly his wind rose, a storm came down on the lake, the waves beat against the boat and it seemed from one moment to the next that they would be wrecked. The disciples, alarmed, awakened Jesus, "Master, carest thou not that we perish?" And he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, "Peace, be still." And the wind ceased and there was a great calm. And He said unto them, "Why are ye so fearful? How is it that ye have no faith? And they feared exceedingly, and said one to another, "What manner of man is this, that even the wind and sea obey him?"

There is one, Simon Peter, who has no fear. Not only does his nature transcend the human, but great is his faith, great his love, great his power of will. Nothing animate nor inanimate can resist these three great qualities. A man who possesses them has renounced all that is temporal and is victorious over time. He has renounced the good things of the flesh, and for this reason can save the flesh; he has renounced material things and so is master of matter. Every one can partake of this power. Faith is sufficient, but it must not be faith only in oneself.

A few years before Christ, a great Italian, captain in many wars, corrupt but a fitting ruler over the putrefaction of the Republic, was on the sea, on a real sea, in a boat with a few rowers, in search of an army which had not come up in time to win the victory for him. The wind began to blow, the tempest arose down on the boat and the pilot wished to turn back to the harbor. But Caesar, taking the hand of the pilot, said to him, "Go forward, fear not, Caesar is with thee and his fortune sails with you." These words of haughty self-confidence heartened the crew; every one, as if a little of Caesar's strength had entered into his soul, did his best to overcome the opposition of the sea. But notwithstanding the efforts of the seamen the ship was nearly sunk and was obliged to turn back. Caesar's faith was only pride and ambition, faith in himself: Christ's faith was all love, love for the Father, love for men.

With this love He could walk to meet the boat of the disciples tacking against a contrary wind, and could step upon the water as on the grass of a meadow. They thought in the darkness that it was a specter, and once again He was obliged to reassure them, "Be of good cheer: it is I; be not afraid." As soon as He was in the boat, the wind fell and in a few minutes they reached the shore. Once again they were astounded because, says the honest Mark, "For they considered not the miracle of the loaves: for their heart was hardened."

This comparison may seem ingenious, but it is revealing, for the miracle of the loaves is the foundation of all the others. Every parable spoken in poetic words or expressed with visible prodigies was as bread prepared in different manners, so that His own followers, at least His very own, should understand the one needful truth that the Spirit is the only fare worthy of men, and that the man who is nourished on that fare is master of the world.

NOT SECRETIVE: A POET

Jesus seems at first sight secretive. He orders those affected by miracle to say to no man who has cured them; He wishes prayers and charity to be done secretly; when the disciples recognize that He is the Christ, He charges them not to repeat it; after the Transfiguration He bids the three keep silence, and when He teaches He uses parables which all men are not capable of understanding.

On further thought, on really considering the matter, it is apparent that Jesus has nothing of the esoteric. He has no secret doctrine to impart to a few acolytes. His words are public and open. He always speaks in the public squares of cities, on the beaches of lakes, in the Synagogue, in the midst of the people. He forbids speaking of His miracles in order that He may not be confused with wizards and exorcists; He commands to do good secretly in order to keep vainglory from destroying merit; He does not wish the Twelve to proclaim Him the Christ before His entry into Jerusalem, the public inauguration of His Messiahship; and He speaks in parables to be better understood by the simple who listen more willingly to a story than to a sermon, and remember a narration better than an argument.

Three of the Evangelists report a speech of Jesus, which seems to contradict this view. "Unto you," He is speaking to the disciples, "it is given to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of God, but to others it is not given; therefore I speak to them in parables, that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand." But Jesus means only to say this, "You understand these mysteries, but the many do not understand them, although they have ears and spirits like yours. And to them that they may understand I speak in parables—that is, in a figurative language of facts because it is easier and more familiar." You

teach children with fables and the simple with stories, and "the many" have remained like the simple and the childish. To overcome the slowness of their minds I use words adapted to their nature. They are all fancy, and little intellect; and the parables are an appeal to the imagination more than to the reasoning powers. I do not employ them therefore to hide the truth, but the better to reveal it to those who could not see it in a purely rational form. For if then they do not understand, it is the fault of their obstinacy, which often closes the eyes and ears of the soul.

Jesus had no mysteries to disseminate. It was His wish that all, even the most humble and ignorant, should understand Him. The parables were not made to hide His teaching from the profane, but to make it more explicit and understandable to every one. That sometimes even the intelligence of the Twelve is inferior to this task is a melancholy conclusion by no means unknown to Jesus.

The marvelous content of His message has cast into the shade His poetic originality, not less marvelous. Jesus never wrote—once only He wrote on the sand, and the wind destroyed forever His handwriting—but in the midst of a people of powerful imagination, of the people who wrote the Psalter, the story of Ruth, the book of Job, the Song of Songs, He would have been one of the greatest poets of all times. His victorious youthfulness of spirit, the racy, popular language of the country where He grew up—the books He had read, few but among the richest of all poetry—His loving communion with the life of the fields and of animals and above all His divine and passionate yearning to give light to those who suffer in the dark, to save those who are being lost forever, to carry to the supreme happiness of the most unhappy (because true poetry does not catch its fire from the light of the stars and of the sun, is not found in the writings left behind by great-grandfathers, but in love, in sorrow in the deeply moved soul); these things combined made of Jesus a poet, an inventor of living and eternal images with which He achieved a miracle on which the Evangelists make no comment, the miracle of communicating the highest truth by the means of stories so simple, familiar, full of grace that after twenty centuries they shine with that unique youth which is eternity. Some of these stories are only idyllic or epic with warm water and put into it the new dough, raised even as much as three measures of flour.

Among the seeds of plants that of the mustard is among the smallest; it can hardly be seen, but from this tiny little seed, if it is put into good earth, springs up a fine shrub, and the fowls of the air lodge in the branches of it. The grain of wheat is not large, the farmer throws it about his other affairs; he sleeps, he goes away from home and comes back. Days pass and nights pass, no thought is given to the seed, but underneath there in the moist, plowed field the seed has germinated. There comes out a blade of green and at the top of this blade an ear, at first green and graceful, then little by little becoming golden grain. Now the field is ready for the mowing and the farmer can commence his harvesting. Likewise with the Kingdom of Heaven and the first news of it. A word seems nothing. What is a word? Syllables, sounds, which come from the lips, enter with difficulty into the ears and only when they come from the heart find other hearts; it is a little thing, small, a breath, a sigh, a sound which comes and goes and the wind carries it away. And yet the word of the Kingdom is like yeast. If it goes into good flour, clean honest flour not adulterated with other grains, it ferments and grows. It is like the seed of the fields which germinates deep under the ground, patient as the earth which hides it, which, when Spring comes, grows green and strong and the wind carries it away. The harvest is ready! The gospel is made up of few words, "The Kingdom is at hand, change your souls!" but if it falls into the heart of men ready for it, of simple men who wish to become great, of righteous men who wish to become holy, of sinners who seek in good for that happiness which they have vainly sought in evil, then those words take root in the depths, put out buds and shoots, flourish in clusters and ears, and luxuriate in a summer never to be followed by the decay of Autumn. Only a few men of those living about Christ believed in the Kingdom and prepared themselves for the great day. Only a few, insignificant men, scattered like tiny

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particles of yeast in the midst of the divided nations and the immense Empires, but these few dozen insignificant men gathered together in the midst of a predestined people were to become, through the contagion of their example, thousands upon thousands, and only three hundred years after them, in the place of Tiberius, ruled a man who bowed the knee before the heirs of the Apostles.

But men must renounce everything else if they are to enjoy the promised Kingdom. Worldly-minded men do the same in their temporal affairs. If a man working in another's field discovers a treasure-store, he quickly hides it again and hurries to sell all that he has to buy that field. If a merchant looking for marvelous jewels worthy to be offered to monarchs, finds a pearl larger and purer than any he has ever seen, he goes and sells everything that he has, even the other pearls of less price, to buy this unique and wonderful pearl.

If the workman and the merchant, material-minded men, who are satisfied with frail acquisitions, are thus ready to sell all their goods to acquire a treasure which seems to them more precious than anything they possess, even though it is only a material and perishable treasure, how much more reason there is for men to renounce what they hold most dear, in order to achieve the Kingdom of God. If the laboring man and the merchant for a money gain, likely to be stolen or destroyed, thus consent to a provisional sacrifice which will give them a hundred per cent profit, ought not we for an infinitely greater, infinitely higher profit, throw away the best we have, even if it has seemed until now of inestimable price?

But before we make this renunciation we must take thought and be sure that what remains to us will be enough to take us to the end of this new undertaking. We must measure the forces of our soul, that it may not happen to us as to the man who wished to build up a tower, a beautiful tower which would soar up to the sky like that of Jerusalem. He took no account of the cost but called the diggers, had the foundations excavated; called the masons and had the four walls of the foundations begun; but when the tower had scarcely been raised above the level of the earth, and was not yet as high as the roof of a house, he was obliged to stop because he had no more money to pay for the mortar, the stones, the bricks and the working men; and the tower remained thus, low and unsightly, in memory of his presumption; and his neighbors mocked at him.

A king who wants to make war on another king first takes account of his soldiers, and if he can count only on ten thousand and the other has twenty thousand, he puts off any idea of war, and sends an embassy of peace before his enemy can take the first hostile step. He who is not sure of himself, of being able to conquer to the last, does not follow Christ. For the foundation of the Kingdom is infinitely harder work than the building of a tower, and the creation of the new man is war not less harsh than external war, although silent and inner.

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