

### The Words of Jesus—Feeding the Five Thousand.

By Rev. James Stalker, D.D.

MATT. XIV., 14 to 21.

The first word of our Lord in this miracle was addressed to the disciples—"Give ye them to eat." He told them to do a thing which was utterly impossible. They began to calculate how much would be required to feed so many—Two hundred pennyworth would not be enough, that everyone might take a little. They made strict inquiry as to their own resources, with the result that they could find only five loaves and two fishes; and what were these among so many? Why should Jesus have asked them to do the impossible? It was in order that they might realise how stupendous was the task which he was about to undertake, and how unequal to it they were themselves. Thus are we often left face to face with impossible tasks; or we try them, and discover how utterly they are beyond our power; and then we are ready to receive divine help. Is not all duty of this impossible kind? The law is exceedingly broad, and the ideal is exceedingly high. You know the lines of Emerson:

"So nigh is grandeur to our dust,  
So near is God to man,  
When duty whispers low, 'Thou must,'  
The youth replies, 'I can.'"

There is truth in these words, yet not the deepest truth. Youth flings itself, nothing doubting, on tasks which are beyond its capabilities; but the real problem of life arises at the point where we discover that the goodness at which we aim is beyond us. There is far deeper truth in St. Augustine's great saying: "Give what Thou commandest, and then command what Thou wilt." The grand moral discovery is, that the Grace of God is that by which we fulfil the law of God.

The second word of this miracle is, "Bring them hither to me." The disciples had inquired and found the extent of the provisions available. These were inadequate, yet Jesus ordered them to be brought to Him. He might have fed the multitudes without any help from the store which the disciples were able to provide; but this is not His way. He started with what they had, and He employed the Twelve to distribute to the rest. God never works without means. Our prayers are in themselves of no avail to make us better; and yet no man will be made better who does not pray. The preacher's words cannot save any man's soul; yet, if we do not preach earnestly, souls will not be saved. All that the Church can do for the evangelisation of the heathen world is not of itself sufficient to make a single Christian; and yet the hope of a perishing world lies in the activity of the Church. It is a good thing to realise how totally inadequate the means at our disposal are for God's work; and

yet it is a sin to undervalue them, because God cannot, or at least will not, do without them. Jesus says, "Bring them hither to Me." With His blessing on them, the five loaves and two fishes provide ample for the wants of the multitude. And God is able to make even the humblest instrumentalities mighty for the pulling down of strongholds. It has been remarked that in the great age of the French pulpit, when it was adorned with such great orators as Bossuet, Fenelon, and Bourdaloue, the moral effect on French society was infinitesimal, whereas, in the next age, in England, the preaching of Whitefield and Wesley, transformed the face of that country. In the one case there was a vast expenditure of learning, wit, and eloquence; in the other, the prominent thing was the unction of the Holy One. Means of every kind go a long way if, before being applied to their objects, they are first brought to Christ. Even meat and drink can nourish and gladden the recipients far more if they are received from His hands. The home in which a blessing is asked on every meal, and where the necessities of life are received as covenant mercies, is sure to be a sunny place, and will exceed in true happiness even a palace, where there is every luxury, but which is without the blessing of the Creator.

St. Luke tells us that Jesus said to the disciples, "Make them sit down by fifties in a company." And St. Mark uses a very pretty word to describe the result. He says they were arranged in "flower-beds." The word calls up the picturesque scene—the well-ordered companies spread all over the green grass. Suppose Jesus had tried to feed the multitude without first reducing it to order, there would have been the wildest confusion, some seizing more than their share and others getting nothing at all. But the orderly arrangement enabled the miracle to be wrought with expedition, and with comfort to all. This is not without instruction. Order is Heaven's first law. For the Sabbath school teacher, for instance, order in the class is absolutely necessary; without it there can be no blessing. If a large Sabbath school is allowed to become noisy, God's work stops. I am afraid that in the Protestant Church the religious life of the individual often suffers from the lack of that method in devotion which the High Churchman cultivates to excess; and I am sure that in the evangelistic work of this city there is deplorable leakage, through the lack of a system by which the results should be garnered in the storehouse of the Church. At our communions we enjoy admirable order, and on this much of the blessing depends. It has not always been so in Scotland. Not long ago the most unseemly crowding and struggling were common at the ordinance; and in such circumstances the dove of peace could not alight on the heart. Our

beautiful, snowy tables bear a resemblance to the "flower-beds" of St. Mark; and, indeed, this miracle has a close connection with the communion, for the deepest truth in it is that Christ is the bread of the soul, and that life eternal is offered through Him to every creature.

### A Cheap and Effective Mode of Well Doing.

A pleasant look and a kindly word would seem to be so inexpensive a mode of well doing that every right-feeling man could have a part in it. Yet this is a method of helping our fellows that is neither valued nor employed as generally as it should be. The man who uniformly greets his acquaintances with a winsome look and word, as he meets or passes them in the street, is an exception in the community. Yet every one of us affects or influences his fellows by his looks and manner and greeting, in his daily walks, more than he has any idea of. He helps or hinders others in this way, hour by hour, day after day. We may shed light and cheer along our pathway of life to gladden and encourage those who meet us, or we may cast a shadow on our fellows, as we pass them, by our apparent spirit and feeling. We are influential all the time in the one way or the other. Yet few think of this as they ought to. It is because they do not think of it that so many fail to act in view of it. Of course a man must have a kindly feeling towards his fellows, and must be willing to forget himself for the moment in their behalf, if he would look kindly, and speak kindly, and give real help by his expression of face and in speech. But it would seem as if so simple and so effective a mode of well doing would be worth trying by more than attempt it.

A man who lately came over from America told the writer that on board the steamer one of the passengers went up to another in the smoking-room and asked him to have a drink with him. The man thus invited continued reading a newspaper and made no reply. The other man again asked him to drink with him. No answer again. A third invitation was then given in these words: "Sir, I have asked you in as friendly a way as possible to drink with me, and each time you went on with your reading, and had not the civility to answer me. Now I ask you for the third time if you will drink wine, whiskey, or anything else with me?" The man then put aside his paper and answered very quietly: "Do you see that glass, sir? Well, if I were to take even a quarter of it, I could not leave off until I had drunk all the liquor on board. This is why I would not drink with you." All present admired the man's self-control, and learned a striking lesson on the danger of putting temptation in a brother's way.—From "The Quiver" for March.