

BREAD, THE OLD-NEW PROBLEM

The International Sunday School Lesson For March 24th is "Jesus Ministering to the Multitude."—Mark 6:32-56.

By William T. Ellis.

"Food will win the war!" shout the bill-boards at us. Even America is slowly waking up to the realization of the fact that bread is the basic factor in the world struggle. Nobody ever gets far away from the bread problem. In Russia, as one travels about, he notices that all conversations are interspersed with the word "klet," or bread. Breadlines, long queues of cold and weary women, are the ultimate political factor in other countries beside Russia. High and low, spiritual and worldly, ignorant and learned, all quickly subordinate every interest to concern for bread; just as did the crowd who thronged about Jesus by the shores of the Lake of Galilee.

Most interesting of all "bread lines," is that horde of more than five thousand hungry persons who were lined up and fed on the hillside overlooking the Sea of Galilee by the great Nazarene teacher, two thousand years ago. Picturesque, impressive, moving, miraculous—the scene has gripped the imagination of painter, sculptor and poet, even as it laid such strong holds on the minds of all four evangelists that they have in common only this one of all the miracles of Jesus.

No Time For Tears.

As the soldier is given leave from the trenches and the hurried, harried, overwrought business man of to-day seeks a few days of rest at mountain or seaside, so Jesus and His followers planned a quiet "retreat" for themselves. One reason was that the Twelve had just returned from a taxing missionary tour of Galilee. Their Leader had said, "Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place and rest a while; for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat." The importance of quiet times in the life of His servants was clearly perceived by Jesus; and these words are still in force.

There was another reason why Jesus sought seclusion from the clamorous, uncomprehending rabble. A great sorrow had come upon Him, an event of deep significance to His life and to His ministry. His kinsman and herald, John the Baptist, had been decapitated by Herod. What this meant to the sensitive spirit of Mary's Son even a dull imagination can partially comprehend. He had lost His great witness and His friend. Because of Him, John had died. This great sorrow overshadowed His spirit, making of slight importance the fact that He, too, had to flee from the jealous Herod's jurisdiction.

As a wounded deer seeks the densest wood, so the smitten heart of Jesus sought solitude in His grief. Right here entered another duty, and a higher; for even the Son of God may not cherish His own sorrow above the world's need. True grief is so holy that it dare not be selfish. Ah, the glory of the brave smiles and tireless service to the cause of those who have lost dear ones at the front.

The multitude pursued Jesus, whose hand and heart had been proved to be of such helpfulness to men's varied needs. Their motive was selfish, but their want was real. The miracles had brought to each man a hint of possible succor for his own peculiar needs. The neighborhood crowd was augmented by the hosts of pilgrims en route to the Passover at Jerusalem, for the fame of the Wonder-worker had spread widely. So eager were the masses to see and hear Him that they ran about around the head of the lake, which He was crossing by boat.

The Compassionate One That spectacle was irresistible. All thought of His own grief and

the needs of himself and followers was submerged, in the mind of Jesus, but the sickness, griefs and ignorance of this claimant host. So he taught them and healed them until eventide.

There is a great deal of nebulous humanitarianism in the world to-day. Some persons would offer it as a substitute for Christianity. Let it be remembered that it was in Christ that this spirit was perfectly manifested; and that even to-day it is best found among those who bear His name. Where His spirit does not permeate and dominate, the great works of charity and benevolence will be looked for in vain. Heathenism builds no asylums, hospitals or soup kitchens; neither does agnosticism or infidelity.

An evangelist was preaching the Gospel in San Francisco's Barbary Coast. Among his hearers was a well known infidel, who challenged the evangelist to meet him in a public debate in some hall. The challenge was accepted; but the preacher made one condition. He asked the infidel to come to the hall on the appointed evening and bring with him a drunkard, who had been made a sober man by infidelity; a fallen woman, who had become clean through hearing a lecture on infidelity; and a gambler, who had been delivered from the awful passion by accepting infidelity. Then the evangelist said, "I promise you when the time for the debate comes, that I will march into that hall at the head of a small army of former drunkards, barlotts and gamblers—who heard the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and were saved by the power of God." The infidel, with a sneering laugh, left the street-meeting.

A Co-operative Charity.

Where help lies the needy resort; be it the soup-kitchen for the hungry, a doctor's office for the sick, a church for the spiritual needy. That is why the miscellaneous multitude, with their varying wants, dogged the footsteps of Jesus. And, as all humanity is tethered by a short chain to the elemental needs of nature, all the assortment of desires that this crowd pressed upon the Beau-

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A scene from "The White Feather," the military play to be presented by Albert Brown and his English company at the Grand Opera house on Saturday, March 23rd, matinee and night.

ful One, resolved themselves later in a desire for food.

This made the lieutenants of the Master uneasy. They would have sent the mob away, shifting back on each the responsibility for food. They had not the wherewithal in sight to feed them, nor had they anything like the immense sum of thirty or forty dollars necessary to buy food from the neighboring villages. The Lord does not believe in these easy evasions of obligation. He puts up to the individual the claim of the many; if obedient to Him, nobody could disregard the social problems of our time. "Give ye them to eat," is the way He turned this big responsibility over to His disciples. Similarly, Americans are called upon to modify their notions that their Allies may have food.

The resultant incidents were a capital instance of organized charity. First, there was the Master's part: He provided the motive, the spirit of economy, holding the others up to their duties. In the great scheme of present-day co-operative benevolence, Jesus represents the spirit of love and compassion; the sustaining force that makes all else possible.

The second party in this organized relief were the disciples. They had the practical work to do; they were the ways and means committee. All the moving to and fro was theirs. The most efficient member appears to have been that quiet man, Andrew, who had a knack of producing the person whom Jesus needed. It was the disciples who arranged the "bread line," seating the company in orderly rows on the grass, and who carried out the actual work of distribution, and later of the collection of the fragments. They were the essential mediums of the whole charity. No convention, church or organization would "go" if it were made up of speech-makers and preachers, and no humble workers.

Then, a vital link in the chain of relief was the small boy. "Only a boy," yet through him five thousand were fed. His provident mother had put up a lunch of five flat barley cakes, with some fish relish. What a remarkable boy he was—or, rather, what exciting sights he had been hearing—that he had not gobbled up that lunch long before noon! Wouldn't you like to hear the story of this day's events as he afterwards rehearsed it to his family, his neigh-

bors, and, later, to his own children and grandchildren?

Every year we witness the wonder of a grain of wheat made into many, plus stocks and roots and leaves. We call that, and the subsequent processes in mill and kitchen that produce the bread we eat, "natural," and such a quick increase as went on in this present instance, when five loaves fed five thousand, a "miracle." In both cases the agent is the same; and shall not God be permitted His own way of working?

Because of the extent of the "sign" wrought, and the number of persons affected, and the multitude of witnesses, this miracle is commonly considered one of the greatest performed by Christ. Note, however, as commentators have pointed out, it was not a miracle of new creation, but of multiplication. "Jesus increased, transformed, healed, restored; He never created. The work of creation is finished, the work of providence continues."

So outstanding and marvellous an act as this feeding of five thousand scarcely needs comment. It still speaks its own messages. It was born of Christ's compassion for men's need; divine power has ever been exerted for human service. Let the man who is tempted to think that the Lord is too high to be concerned for his temporal affairs remember the miracle of the loaves and fishes. It was, also, a "sign," one more attestation of the deity of Jesus.

Incidentally, it conveyed practical and needed suggestions. There was the "grace before meat," which accompanied the miracle. "Too many Christian tables are unblest, and unthankful. Again, the whole procedure was orderly. God always works so. There is warrant in this incident for the modern organized forms of religion. "Let all things be done decently and in order."

And, finally, and most practically, here was a lesson in thrift to an improvident company of people. A lesson newly being learned to-day. Of the fragments which remained, enough was gathered to fill the wallets of the twelve. The Lord's gifts are always to overflowing, but He permits no waste. Jesus could multiply loaves at will—yet He carefully saved the food left over from the feast. The pinch of to-day is a bitter reminder to many of the waste of yesterday. Thrift is not a denial of faith, but an expression of it.



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