

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

must probably be unreal and artificial. It has, I trust, been shown, on the contrary, that both may be perfectly trustworthy and genuine.

We must therefore decline to allow ourselves to be entangled in the network of misleading statistics—even if those statistics were less meagre and scanty than they are—by which Mr. Gray in this work of his, "Hebrew Proper Names," has laboriously attempted to enmesh us.

ANDREW C. ROBINSON.



ART. V.—THE BREAD OF LIFE.

"I am that Bread of life."—JOHN vi. 48.

IT was in the little synagogue at Capernaum that our Lord pronounced this memorable discourse. As soon as the momentous words in the text were uttered, the Jews began murmuring to each other their dissatisfaction. They did not pay any attention to the explanation which Christ was giving, but seized with obstinate malignity on the point which they did not understand in its barest and most striking form. "*Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph?*" they mutter. With dogged dulness, they refuse to think how the Person before them can be anything beyond what He seems. With stupid sarcasm and irony, they ask themselves, "Have we been mistaken? Is He not just that young man from Nazareth? We know the respectable Joseph. We know that quiet woman Mary. We know all about Him. What is this talk about coming down from heaven? Whatever He may have done for us in the wilderness yesterday, we are plain, practical men, and we won't stand it." Joseph, you will remember, by not putting away Mary, became legally, from a human point of view, the reputed father of her child.

The murmuring is among the crowd who are listening to the statements of Jesus, and the criticisms are not openly stated to Him. The word which St. John uses means a confused hum of objections in an undertone. Jesus asks them not to grumble amongst themselves, and quietly goes on with the subject of His discourse. He sees that this is no fit opportunity to enter into a personal explanation of His antecedents. With calm, fearless distinctness, for the warning of those who were murmuring, and for the encouragement of those who were beginning to follow Him, He continues to explain how it is that some believe and some reject. "*No man can come to Me except the Father which sent Me draw him.*" The Father was willing to prepare and draw every-

body ; the reason why some were not drawn was because they refused. Only those who were willing to follow this guidance and preparation would come. The preparation and drawing were, in a general sense, through a proper understanding of Moses, the prophets, the psalmists, the sacrifices ; and in each individual case through the discipline of life, its chastisements, warnings and encouragements. To those who once welcomed these Divine influences and methods, much would be given. It would be their reward to learn more and more, to know God, to recognise and worship the Son who came to reveal Him.

“ *It is written in the Prophets,*” continues our Lord, “ *And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath come to the Father, cometh unto Me.*” He still further explains the drawing of souls and its consequences. The Divine teaching and the Divine drawing were universal, ready for every man ; the readiness to receive it was a matter of each single heart and soul. Natural religion and Hebrew religion, when properly understood, must necessarily lead to Christ, who embodied all truth. Those who had ears to hear the Father’s messages, those who had eyes to see His lessons and a heart to receive His influences and impressions, would certainly come to the express image of His own Person, who combined and exemplified in Himself all these Divine forces.

But these previous teachings and drawings were imperfect. Something more direct was needed—something higher, purer, better, clearer, truer. The former influences did not enable people to do without the supreme revelation of the Son, as if they had really seen God with unveiled eye. “ *Not that any man hath seen the Father, save He which is of God: He hath seen the Father.*” None had seen God so as to interpret Him to the world perfectly, but He which is of God—His only-begotten Son.

And now comes the point in the conversation for a declaration of the deepest importance. The hum of anger in the little synagogue has died away as the afternoon wears on, and they listen in silent amazement. Here, says the Lord, is that Divine Interpreter of God, here is that Source of Life, here is He to whom it is given to have life in Himself. By this presence the will of the Father which had been declared in a previous sentence was accomplished. “ *This is the will of Him that sent Me,*” Jesus had said, “ *that everyone which seeth the Son, and believeth on Him, may have everlasting life ; and I will raise him up at the last day.*” To those who believe and trust themselves to Him, a share in this true life is at once imparted ; and that share is the beginning of the true spiritual

life, the life of the purified intellect, the life of the regenerated soul, the life of righteousness and love, which will last for ever. "*Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on Me hath everlasting life.*"

And then, as His custom was, He seizes some idea that was present in the conversation, and makes it the vehicle for communicating some deep spiritual truth. You are asking, He says, for something better than the manna in the wilderness, which you quoted just now as the credentials of Moses. Know that I Myself am what you seek. I Myself am the Incarnate Word of God, giving spiritual food and sustenance, just as bread is the type of natural life and support. "*I am that Bread of Life.*" You have been bringing forward the claims of Moses and the manna, but however beautiful that help from God in dire distress may have been, what a poor result it had in comparison of the True Spiritual Bread which is here before you! The manna merely sustained the perishable body: the True Bread is eternal life for the soul! "*Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the Bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die.*"

With astounding words, but quiet and grave in the silence of the congregation, He continues to unfold what is the spiritual meaning of this figure of the bread, and how the soul is to take it to itself as nourishment. We saw just now that to those who believed a share in the true life is at once imparted. But what are they to believe? What are the great facts of revelation which transform the soul, and bring it back to God? They have to believe in the Lamb of God which takes away the sin of the world—the atoning Sacrifice of Calvary. Without that redeeming and regenerating Sacrifice, even the presence of the Incarnate Word Himself among them would be of little use. There would be no imperative and uncompromising condemnation of sin, no touching the heart of man in reconciliation to his God, no moving and attracting power of love for the perfect love of the Redeemer. It was not unless He was "*lifted up*" that He would *draw all men unto Him*. The true spiritual sustenance, the beginning of eternal life, the true spiritual bread from heaven, God's grace and power imparted to the soul through faith, would not come unless the great propitiation were made. The true spiritual heavenly bread which He would give would be all the glorious facts, all the Divine truths, all the stores of grace which were implied and covenanted by the sacrifice of His earthly body and life, which He would give for the life of the world. "*I am the living Bread which came down from heaven; if any man eat of this Bread, he shall live for ever: and the Bread*

which I will give is My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."

Who cannot see here that there is something more than merely keeping the commandments of Jesus Christ? Clearly the words before us mean that He, in His full personality, must be to our souls what daily food is to our bodies. "They mean," says a great writer, "that we must live upon Him; that we must be ever walking by faith in Him; that we must look up to Him habitually in all our temptations, distresses, and perplexities—as our only Comforter, Deliverer, and Guide; that we must be in communion with Him as members with their Head; and this day by day and always, for without Him we can do nothing, and our souls will sicken and fall away from their sound health if they are kept even a day without that nourishment, which turning to Him in prayer and in constant meditation can alone supply them with. Many persons, by forgetting the force and peculiar meaning of the command to make Christ our food, and by putting always in the place of such living expressions the mere injunction to obey Christ's law, have, in fact, grown cold in their feelings towards Him, have lost the sense of their close relationship to Him, have not held fast to Him as their Head, nor have sought of Him daily their spiritual nourishment and strength."

There is, as I shall point out before the end of this paper, a specially appointed means of realizing this union. But in the meantime we will continue the lesson to the end, and see what it meant as a general truth, before the particular institution for concentrating it in one special occasion was ordained.

The congregation is now thoroughly disturbed. Having failed to follow Jesus before, they cannot follow Him now. "*The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying, How can this man give us His flesh to eat?*" And He is moved by their obstinate discussion, now no longer restrained, to expound the doctrine of the True Bread still more pointedly, and in words still more striking, startling, and penetrating. Their fathers had eaten the manna in the wilderness, and they themselves had eaten the loaves in the desert: can they not understand that there is something on which their SOULS are to be sustained, the true spiritual Bread of Heaven, of which the manna and the loaves were types? Did they not remember the great system of sacrifices, and how they had no benefit from them unless they partook of them? even so unless they shared in the sacrifice which the Bread itself meant, they would have no part in that either. That true spiritual Bread, in all the length and breadth and depth and height of its glorious meaning, was summed up in the central

fact and truth of Christ's revelation, the redemption of the world by the sacrifice of Calvary. Jesus Himself was the true spiritual Bread, but even He Himself was not completely that Bread unless His flesh was sacrificed and His blood poured out in atonement. To share, then, in the true Bread, they must eat that flesh of His sacrifice, and drink that blood of His atonement. How could they do that? Not, of course, by touching Him as He sat there in bodily presence before them in the synagogue at Capernaum, but by some wonderful inner import and truth. It was by becoming filled with the spirit the meaning of that sacrifice, the grace of it, the effect of it, the power of it, the complete union which it offered, the salvation which it guaranteed, the virtues, faith, hope, love, joy, peace, purity, and all the other things which it communicated; by drinking in the spirit of the meaning of that atonement, and the exceeding great and precious privileges which it conferred. Thus would their souls become nourished with the true spiritual Bread, as their bodies would be nourished by common food. And they would become filled with the spirit of all that was meant by the sacrifice and atonement, by faith, love, contemplation, devotion. And when the time came for Him to go forth and die, and be in very act the Lamb of God taking away the sin of the world, then He would bequeath them a solemn and simple rite, which would enable them now and again to concentrate on Him that faith, love, contemplation, devotion, and so be filled with that spirit, and thus be nourished by the true spiritual Bread, Himself, His living grace and power. "*Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood hath eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is meat indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood dwelleth in Me, and I in him.*" That was the point; the indwelling of the Divine Being of Christ, the Son of God; perfect union of mind, heart, and soul with Him. "*As the living Father hath sent Me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth Me, even he shall live by Me.*" The Son's spiritual being depends on His utter, inseparable, complete union with His Father: so the spiritual being of the redeemed depends on union with Himself.

So He comes to an end of this vital revelation of Himself. After the great declaration He repeats as a sort of echo, quietly dying away and relapsing into silence, the marvellous contrast between this communication of spiritual life by believing on Him, and the mere manner of Moses. He weaves into the final repetition of the declaration all the

explanations He has been giving as to the spirituality of His meaning. *"This is that Bread which came down from heaven; not as your fathers did eat manna and are dead: he that eateth of this Bread shall live for ever."*

That was the close. Silence fell in the little building. *"These things said He in the synagogue, as He taught in Capernaum."* He spoke purposely in strong, pointed language, although they would not understand it at first, with the very object that it might sink deep into their minds and never be forgotten. It could not have its proper effect at once. *Many, therefore, of His disciples, when they had heard this, said: "This is an hard saying: who can hear it?"* Our Lord at once combats their objection by giving them another and equally striking and momentous point to think of. *"When Jesus knew in Himself that His disciples murmured at it, He said unto them, Doth this offend you? What and if ye shall see the Son of Man ascend up where He was before?"* Part of what the listeners objected to was the coming down from heaven. That objection would be entirely removed if they actually saw with their own eyes His glorified Body disappearing in a cloud of light. Then also they would understand that the whole meaning of the discourse on the True Bread was spiritual. They were marvellous truths of vital importance which it taught, unveiling the very mysteries of the Godhead in its relation to man, the very central shrine of the Christian faith.

The Ascension would show them this. We may notice in passing that St. John takes the fact of the Ascension for granted and as well known, in chap. iii., ver. 13: *"No man hath ascended up to heaven but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of Man which is in heaven;"* and in chap. xx., ver. 17: *"Touch Me not, for I have not yet ascended to My Father."* The beginning and the close of our Lord's earthly life had been so fully described by the other evangelists, that it was not necessary for St. John to give them in his own supplemental gospel. *"It is the spirit that quickeneth,"* continued our Lord, as His final comment on His sermon: *"the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are SPIRIT and they are LIFE."* The very point of the whole discourse was to show them the infinite grandeur and force of these spiritual doctrines, so far beyond any mere earthly sign or fact, such as manna, or the loaves in the wilderness, or the Passover. Eating His flesh was a spiritual expression, drinking His blood was a spiritual expression, the True Bread was a spiritual expression, dwelling in Him was a spiritual expression. The importance of these words and the truths which they conveyed was that they were spirit and life. The

flesh as mere flesh was nothing: it was the mere material of the sacrifice. It was its meaning that was to be grasped: it was the spirit that gave life. The words that He spoke to them only took visible bread as the outward sign of an inward and spiritual grace. The visible flesh and blood were the expression of the spiritual feeding, the spiritual participation of the sacrifice, the spiritual union. It was the inner meaning of all these beautiful and deep figures and types and facts that He was driving home to their hearts.

What a flood of light must have been thrown for the disciples on this discourse in after days, when, on that evening in Jerusalem, *He took bread and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is My body. And He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; for this is My blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.* He was to be the Lamb of God taking away the sin of the world. He was prefigured by the Paschal Lamb, slain once a year as a sin-offering for each family. Just as each family held a feast of thanksgiving on the lamb after it had been sacrificed, so every Christian was to have an outward and visible means of participating spiritually in the one great spiritual sacrifice. No more lambs were to be slaughtered by Jewish priests; the simplest elements of food, bread and wine, solemnly hallowed, were to be the Body and Blood of Christ. This was how the true spiritual heavenly Bread which He would give would be all that was implied by the sacrifice of His earthly body and life, which He gave for the life of the world. To all Christians after the Cross of Calvary this true heavenly bread or sustenance is represented, and to the recipient whose faith is alive is conveyed, in "the most comfortable sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ; to be by us received in remembrance of His meritorious Cross and Passion, whereby alone we obtain remission of our sins, and are made partakers of the kingdom of heaven." Union with Christ, spiritual sustenance from Him, may be had by prayer and in other ways; but the most direct ordinance for realizing and sealing it is in the Lord's Supper.

Now He is here, I seem no longer here!
 This place of light is not my chamber dim,
 It is not He with me, but I with Him,
 And Host, not Guest, He breaks the bread of cheer.

This is His guile—He makes me act the host
 To shelter Him, and lo! He shelters me;
 Asking for alms, He summons me to be
 A guest at banquets of the Holy Ghost.

So on and on, through many an opening door
That gladly opens to the key I bring,
From brightening court to court of Christ, my King,
Hope led, love fed, I journey evermore.

At last I trust these changing scenes will cease ;
There is a court, I hear, where He abides ;
No door beyond that further glory hides—
My Host at home, all change is changed to peace.

The neglect of Holy Communion is the neglect of Christianity. Christ bade His followers receive the bread they ate as His Body, the wine they drank as His Blood. True love for God, true love for men, will not spring up in us spontaneously nor by any efforts we may make to kindle it in ourselves, nor is the message of Christianity fully delivered when love to the human race is declared to be a duty ; human beings will not unite merely because they are told to do so, nor will the lawless passions submit to a mere reproof. Men cannot learn to love each other, the Lord tells us, but "by eating His flesh and drinking His blood"; by union with Him. The Lord does not regard it as possible to unite men to each other except by first uniting them to Himself. And in the Lord's Supper, in which the union of Christians is shown forth, it is revealed as not merely depending on the natural passion of humanity implanted in their breasts, nor merely on the command of Christ calling that passion into activity, but upon this intimate personal union between Christ and His followers thus in its truest sense obtained. The union of mankind in love, because it is a union begun and subsisting only in Christ, is secured and ratified by the Lord's Supper.¹

I have not desired to write much here about this great Christian ordinance, but only in its aspect as the consummation of the deep spiritual teaching of St. John's sixth chapter. The ordinance is a mystery, and it is enough for us to know that in it the Lord has covenanted to impart His grace, Himself, in proportion to our faith. God grant that the result of our meditation on this momentous passage may be that we may each of us in our measure and degree feel more really the need of a closer union with our Saviour. Such a union will differ indefinitely in proportion to our capacities, circumstances and characters ; but it is possible for each of us, however simple, however occupied with the affairs of this life, to realize it in our inmost souls. The promise stands sure, and the claim of it has never been disappointed. Him that cometh unto Me I will in nowise cast out !

In conclusion, I may be allowed to pay a brief tribute to

¹ " Ecce Homo."

the memory of two good and prominent men who went to their long home yesterday, well known amongst us here.¹ Life is like a kaleidoscope, always shifting its proportions and arrangements. Hardly a week passes but a familiar face is vacant in our vast and complex British social organism. One was an able and upright Lord Mayor, Sir Stuart Knill, a gentleman of culture and refinement, with literary and musical tastes, an exemplary citizen, a kindly and courteous friend and host. It is easy for the Church of England in its strength and charity to appreciate that enthusiastic zeal for the exclusive Church that he served, which made him do what he could during his mayoralty to advance her interests. He had the almost unique fortune in civic tradition of seeing his son fill an aldermanic chair by his side before he died. He has left an honourable name.

The other is one who was held in singular affection by all British Freemasons, of whom he was the highest official under the Prince of Wales. It is of great importance in social life that those who are honoured with high place should themselves be men of high principles and stainless conduct. The same sympathetic courtesy, natural to a highbred English gentleman, but not always exhibited in official relations, which made Lord Lathom a gracious ruler in the Court, endeared him to the vast and influential body to whom he stood in so close a relation. He recognised the seriousness and noble aims of British Freemasonry, and spared no pains in its service. He was possessed of a charm of manner peculiarly his own, which won the respect and love of all with whom he was brought in contact. In the discharge of the many obligations he was called upon to fulfil, all of which he performed so admirably, he was animated by the highest sense of duty; whether assisting in a Court function, or presiding over a body of the craft, or in conducting daily worship in his own household, he was inspired by the same sense of the dignity and responsibility of life.

Freemasonry has advanced during the present reign in dignity, importance, and extent to an unprecedented degree. Its members have a strong loyalty to St. Paul's as having been built by Freemasons, to whom its illustrious architect is always held traditionally to have belonged. They have given one of the sections of our mosaic work as a memorial of the Bicentenary of the Cathedral. They are always ready to hold special services in every district in the cause of philanthropy and good works. In every lodge of this law-abiding and

¹ This paper is the substance of a sermon preached at St. Paul's Cathedral, on Sunday afternoon, November 20, 1898.

charitable brotherhood throughout the Empire there will be sincere sorrow for the premature and sudden removal of a ruler of their order so high-principled, just, courteous and kindly, whose services to themselves have been invaluable.

WILLIAM SINCLAIR.

Reviews.

The Poetry and the Religion of the Psalms, being the Croall Lectures for 1893-94. By JAMES ROBERTSON, D.D. Blackwood. Price 12s.

SLOWLY, but irresistibly, English common-sense and sobriety of judgment are asserting themselves in the matter of Old Testament criticism. Brilliant hypothesis can no longer claim a monopoly of attention in face of facts which are the common property of scholars. The Higher Criticism, in its "advanced" form, has nearly had its day (and a pretty destructive day it has been, taken altogether). It is rapidly growing obsolete, and must, in the nature of things, give way to some fresh development. Meanwhile, we may be grateful to it for the impetus which its very vagaries have given to the advancement of profounder views of revelation generally, and of the Old Testament in particular.

Dr. Robertson has already come before the public as an antagonist of the higher critics; he is in every sense a foeman worthy of the finest critical steel. His knowledge is deep as well as wide; his sagacity is great; his tact in handling his subject consummate. The present work is simply invaluable. We do not believe that the edge of his argument can be turned by any fair process of logic; and we are convinced that his contention that the old traditional view of the origin of the Psalter is—with certain needful modifications—a correct one, is altogether true. Unlike the books of all too many of the higher critics, the present volume is extremely interesting to read; the lucid style and the straightforward dealing with problems of literary and historical criticism are noticeable features in a very noticeable book.

Law's Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life. New edition, with Preface and Notes by Canon J. H. OVERTON, D.D. London: Macmillan and Co. Price 8s. 6d.

This is the first volume of the new "English Theological Library" which the Rev. F. Relton has undertaken to supervise on behalf of Messrs. Macmillan. Mr. Relton has been fortunate in securing the services of Canon Overton as editor of Law's "Serious Call"—a book which, published 170 years ago, marked an epoch in the history of religion in England. The editor in his preface justly says that the great Evangelical revival of the eighteenth century owed its first impetus to this book more than to any other.