

"This light bread."

Numbers 21: 5; 11: 6.

E. Dennett.

Christian Friend, vol. 8, 1881, p. 145.

It has often been noticed that the burst of song which broke forth from redeemed Israel on the banks of the Red Sea had scarcely died away before they began to murmur against Moses, saying, "What shall we drink?" Though they had been slaves under the iron yoke of Pharaoh, they were not prepared for the hardships of the desert; and as a consequence their hearts were filled with rebellion, and their lips with murmurs.

There were three things that made up the bitterness of their daily lives, all of which are most instructive to ourselves. First, there was "no bread, neither is there any water" (Num. 21: 5; Ex. 15, 16.); secondly, they loathed, became weary of the bread which God had provided for them, saying, "Our soul is dried away: there is nothing at all, beside this manna, before our eyes" (Num. 11: 6); and thirdly, they longed after the food of Egypt, "the fish, the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlick." (Num. 11: 5; Ex. 16: 3.)

These things together became so insupportable that they again and again avowed that they would far rather have remained in Egypt. "Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples (as types): and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come." (1 Cor. 10: 11.)

The first thing then that troubled them was, that they found no bread and no water in the desert. As the psalmist expresses it, they found it "a dry and thirsty land, where no water is." Brought out of Egypt — type of the world of nature, of man in his natural condition — they had lost their accustomed food; and the wilderness on which they had entered was destitute of all the sources from which they had hitherto drawn, as well as those from which they needed now to draw, their life and sustenance. They had lost their old life for ever (in figure) in the Red Sea, the life which Egypt fed and nourished; and they now possessed a new, the springs of which were afar from the scene through which they were passing.

It is so with the believer now. For the new life which he possesses in a risen Christ there is neither bread nor water in the desert. Time was, before he was met by the grace of God, and brought out of darkness into His marvellous light, when all the springs of his life were in the world; but now the world has become to him "a wilderness wide," and looking out upon it he has to learn that it can offer him nothing either to stimulate or to refresh him in his pilgrim way. Not of the world, even as Christ was not of the world, as dead with Christ to it, and risen with Him out of it, how could he find his suited food in it, or slake his thirst at its polluted streams?

These truths are as familiar as household words; but we need to challenge our hearts continually as to their practical acceptance. Do we then habitually act in the remembrance that,

apart from the few and simple requirements of our bodies, the scene of our strangership contains nothing for us, nothing to aid or invigorate; but, on the other hand, everything calculated to blight and deaden, the life we have in Christ Jesus?

It is of the last importance, especially for young believers whose feet have just entered upon the sands of the desert, to have this continually in our minds, that there is no bread or water to be found for our souls in the wilderness; for we belong to another scene. Christ Himself at the right hand of God is our life (Col. 3: 3), and it is therefore from thence, and from thence alone, that we can derive our nourishment and strength. "All our springs" are in Christ risen and glorified. With Him alone is the fountain of life. The believer who walks through the world in the power of this truth, expecting nothing, nothing but snares and dangers, from it, will be kept in independence of it; he will be conscious of a life that has no affinities to anything round about him, and he will exhibit a life, fed from on high, which, shining as a light in the moral darkness of this scene, will be a testimony for Christ, a testimony of grace, and also, alas! of coming judgment.

The second thing that afflicted these poor pilgrims was, that they became weary of the food which God had provided for them. It was in response to their murmurings (for as yet they were under grace, Sinai not having been reached) that He in His tenderness and mercy gave them the manna. "The whole congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and against Aaron in the wilderness: and the children of Israel said unto them, Would to God we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh-pots, and when we did eat bread to the full; for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger." Ex. 16: 2, 3.) Such conduct merited judgment; but the Lord acted in grace, and hence he said to Moses, "Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you." And this He did day by day for forty years, until they passed over the Jordan. (Joshua 5.) The manna was Israel's food, suited food for the wilderness, and it was of this that they tired, until at length they dared to say, "Our soul loatheth this light bread." (Num. 21: 5.) Now the manna, as our readers know, is a type of Christ, of a humbled Christ, of all that Christ was in His tenderness, grace, sympathy, etc., as He passed through this scene; of all that He is therefore as suited to us in wilderness circumstances as strangers and pilgrims. Christ then in this character is our only food (see John 6), the only food that can sustain and strengthen us; but Christ, it should be observed, in every aspect in which He is presented to us as the Manna. We need all that He is as thus given; but we need nothing outside of Himself — nothing but Himself; for since He Himself is our life, it is He only that can sustain it.

How, then, is it possible for the believer to weary of it? We have two natures, the old and the new, and "these are contrary the one to the other." If therefore we are not walking in the spirit (see Gal. 5) the flesh will assert its desires, and the flesh never loves Christ; the mind of the flesh, indeed, is enmity against God. (Rom. 8.) It is the flesh therefore that wearies of Christ, that, desiring its own proper food, begets in us a disrelish, a distaste, for the heavenly manna. But the flesh is subtle, and when thus acting in the believer generally loves to conceal its true character. But flesh is flesh, whatever the forms in which it is expressed; and even as Satan knows how to transform himself into an angel of light, so the flesh knows how to assume most pious forms. It is necessary therefore to be on our guard, lest we also fall into this grievous sin of loathing "this light bread."

Signs of this tendency often appear where least expected. For example, if a ministry which appeals to the intellect instead of to the heart and conscience is preferred; if the exposition of interesting principles, in which the natural man can even delight, is welcomed rather than a simple presentation of Christ Himself; if we become restless under sound doctrine, and after our own desires heap to ourselves teachers having itching ears; if we turn to books which deal with spiritual or prophetic problems (though these may have their place) rather than to those that unfold the excellencies and the graces of Christ; if we seek companionship with those who can entertain us naturally or socially in preference to those with whom we could have spiritual fellowship, those with whom Christ alone would be the bond; if we are losing our appetite for the Scriptures, and, it may be added, if we are losing the sense of our pilgrim character, and are gradually settling down into the enjoyment of things around — then there is reason to fear that we are becoming weary of "this light food." But the test may be a positive one. Let us then boldly ask ourselves whether we are satisfied with Christ, satisfied to the full in Him as our daily food. Let us ask ourselves this question in our homes, in our daily and social life, in our leisure moments, when listening to ministry, when gathered together in the assembly of the saints. It is one thing to sing -

"Jesus, of Thee we ne'er would tire;

The new and living Food

Can satisfy our heart's desire;

And life is in Thy blood."

and it is another thing to know it practically. May the Lord keep us from the grievous sin of losing our appetite for Himself.

Combined with this, in the case of the Israelites, there was an intense desire for the things of Egypt. How often did they longingly recall the flesh-pots, the fish, the leeks, the melons, and the cucumbers of Egypt? The two things always go together. Losing appetite for Christ is sometimes the consequence of indulgence in, and sometimes the cause of desiring, Egyptian gratifications. But let us ask plainly what this means. To long after the food of Egypt, then, is for the believer to seek after the same gratifications, amusements, sources of enjoyment, as the man of the world. The natural man has his suited food, that in which he endeavours to find his life, as the Christian has his. If the believer turn from Christ to that on which the worldling feeds, he is in exactly the same case as the Israelites. Thus, if the Christian look with desire of heart to the world's amusements and social enjoyments; if he take delight in the world's subjects of pride — painting, sculpture, architecture, national greatness; in its leaders in science, philosophy, literature, and art; if he is becoming interested in politics and party conflicts; if he would feed his mind with the world's books; if he court worldly society, the world's fashions, distinctions, luxuries, and ways; if he cultivate the world's habits and manners; if, in short, he is turning to any of the sources of earth, any of its sources of enjoyment, pride, pleasure, or exaltation, he is, in fact, longing after the flesh-pots of Egypt.

What, then, have we to say to these things? Are we - you, beloved reader — in this case? There is no sadder spectacle than that presented by some who once knew what it was to feed on Christ, and to find their all in Him, but who now are turning back to the very things which they had gladly refused for His sake. They did run well, but they have been hindered through the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, or the pride of life. Whatever is not Christ, and of Christ, is Egypt, and of Egypt. We need therefore to be so attracted, possessed, and absorbed by Christ as to have every want satisfied in Himself. This is the effectual antidote to every fascination and allurements that Egypt can present.

"Art thou weaned from Egypt's pleasures?

God in secret thee shall keep;

There unfold His hidden treasures,

There His love's exhaustless deep."

E. D.