

Bread or Stones?

Part I

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This, I think you will agree, is a subject of vital importance to everyone. Somewhere in the New Testament there is a question: "If a man ask for bread, will ye give him a stone?" and we need to consider just what that means and whether we are receiving Bread or Stones. It is quite clear, as far as our aspirations and higher needs are concerned, that many of us are unsatisfied with the nourishment we have been receiving. The very fact that so many people are going hither and thither, seeking for some way to satisfy their interior hunger, is, I think, fairly good evidence that some sort of nourishment is lacking and that they cannot exist entirely upon the "stones" and indigestible food they have been receiving. Here I do not refer to "The Philosopher's Stone," which although it, too, may not be digestible to some on account of the fact that they have not yet realized its importance, is, in itself, rich with inner nourishment for those who have learned how to extract it. But there are, I am afraid, a good many "philosophers" who deal in "stones" of a very different quality, stones which are less digestible than "The Philosopher's Stone," and from which no very great nourishment may be obtained by any human being.

There are many ways in which we may study this matter. For one thing, a stone represents fixity, rigidity of law. An altar is rightly made of stone, or of oak wood, or some very hard and rigid substance, because it represents the solid basis of the Work; but when we come to partake of the sacraments, we do not attempt to eat the altar, we desire to obtain the Eucharist, the summit of the Work, which is quite a different thing.

What we need is Living Food, for we ourselves are Living Beings, constantly changing, and there is within us no element that is fixed and unchangeable. We must also realize the difference between, what we may term, a living and a dead teaching. Of course, stone is not in itself "dead." In-so-far as it is a part of the One Substance it is really very full of life, we have only to strike it and it will give forth a spark of the Divine Fire immediately. And yet, it is not a part of the Divine Substance suitable for human consumption in that form. It must pass

through a great many changes, or stages in the evolutionary process, before it may be used as human nourishment; whereas, on the other hand, bread is made from the most perfect and nourishing product of the earth. Wheat, or grain, has been held in the greatest religious veneration from the very earliest times, it is the Symbol of Life itself. Gods of Corn and Wine, otherwise those presiding over human nourishment, were the very earliest type of Gods invented, shall I say, by man. But there was a very good reason for this, for the human race, the flower of creation, cannot fulfill its purpose on any plane without nourishment. It is impossible to perform any work, much less The Great Work, unless we are properly nourished on all planes. Practically all religions known to us at the present day, including Christianity, have their roots in this Symbolism of Corn and Wine presided over by The Sun. The outer forms may have changed to some extent; but those who have given any attention to the study of the origin of religions, agree that they have their basis in these ideas.

Now corn is capable of being made into the most perfect food for human consumption, and it is also a symbol of that which nourishes the higher part of our Being, but it must pass through certain processes. In the same way we have to pass through a certain process of transformation before we are able to fulfil the Purpose of our existence.

It is interesting to note that the second letter of the Hebrew alphabet—Beth—means A House; but this does not necessarily mean A House of Stone, although the word "Beth" is usually used to denote a Temple, as, for instance, "Beth-El," The House of God. We must not, however, overlook the fact that the House of God should be a "Living Temple"—the Temple of our own body.

In the New Testament we find many references to Bread, and we find that Christ actually called Himself "The Bread of Life." Where did Christ come from? He came from Bethlehem or Beth-lechem, which means The House of Bread, thus He had good reason to call Himself "The Bread of Life." It is very significant, too, that he came from a Living House, not a Stone-tomb.

Again He has told us that "The Kingdom of Heaven is within us," and further, that "The Kingdom of Heaven is like unto the leaven which a woman puts into three measures of meal and it leaveneth the whole." This "leaven" is always necessary in order to make Bread. The substance of our own Being must undergo a similar process before perfection is reached.

The first process may require the use of Stones, for it is between Stones that the corn is ground. Also, it is written, "The mills of the gods grind slowly, but they grind exceedingly small." We, ourselves must pass through this process of being ground down by the Stones of the Gods until we become like unto a very fine powder, until we learn to recognize the One Undifferentiated Substance of our being. Until this has been accomplished, we seem to come under the Rigid Law of Stone; but once we have been properly prepared, we are ready for the next process, and, as in breadmaking, certain elements must be added to us. First, there is Salt, the Salt of experience, which comes from the Great Sea of Understanding. This is very necessary, for it is also written, "Ye are the salt of the earth, and if the salt hath lost its savor, wherewith shall it be salted?" Again, the Water of the Great Sea must be mixed with the other elements. Water is a very wonderful Symbol; for whereas Wheat represents something growing from the ground towards the Sun, a vertical line, so the surface of Water is level or horizontal. These two, the Wheat and the Water, the Upright and the Horizontal, give us the Symbol of the Cross. This is possibly why the Wafer has been thus marked since the earliest times. It represents the uniting of the Positive and Negative elements in ourselves, and these again must be kneaded together with the Salt of experience.

So far, we have but the possibilities of "unleavened bread" and something else is needful. This is the "Leaven"—Symbol of the Kingdom of Heaven.

It is necessary for this "LEAVEN" or Higher Nature of Man to enter into the material ingredients in order that the life processes may be complete. Unless we realize the necessity for this Leaven, we are unable to "rise" to the height of Destiny. This Leaven within us causes us to expand in all directions, bringing with it the realization of the higher consciousness, the consciousness of the Kingdom of Heaven, whereby we are able to extend the horizontal of our minds towards Infinity. This leaven is the True Will within us, whereby we have the possibility of fulfilling the True Purpose of our Being.

The Great Work has always consisted of two processes, the first of which is known as Solve, or the volatilization of the fixed; the other as Coagula, the fixation of the volatile. The first means the realization of our essential Unity with God; the second, the necessity of bringing the Light down to all mankind. The man who has completed the first half of the Great Work is fit to pass through the process of "baking," because the fires of

life, which previously would have burned him, will now do him no harm, but merely make him more useful. This process is suggested by the Descent of Christ into Hell after His Crucifixion.

Just as the material Bread passes through these processes in order to make it fit for food for Man, so Man, undergoing these changes, fits himself for a place in the Kingdom of Heaven upon Earth; and his body, in turn, becomes symbolical of Spiritual Food, as his Blood, which is his very Life, becomes the Wine of the Sacrament. His very presence on earth feeds the hungry and thirsty souls around him.

As, then, from the Vegetable Kingdom we may produce a certain food fit for man, so from the Human Kingdom is produced the Man who is fit for Heaven; and so the process goes on. Man eats the Bread, it nourishes his body, being itself broken up in order to nourish the different parts of that body, and provided the wheat is whole, the husks being left on, it supplies also an element of purification. We all know how much more purifying is brown bread to the modern bleached production usually eaten, but leaving that aside we find that bread together with water will sustain life, and forms in itself an almost complete nourishment for the body.

Bread and Water is perhaps the simplest kind of fare we can imagine, yet in a way it represents the very highest. We find this same Bread used in the Sacraments with the water, in that case perhaps turned into wine. These two elements, so important in the Church, are yet strangely enough the two things on which the prisoner is fed in his stone cell. It is a very significant fact that we are all more or less prisoners in our stone cells as long as we are under the illusion of a "fixed law," not realizing that Stability consists in Constant Change and that this is the important aspect of all things. When Christ said: "I am the same yesterday, today and forever," He referred to Himself as the One Substance; always the same Substance, though ever changing in form. Let us remember this and we shall get rid of some of our ideas of Rigidity and Sameness which leads to Stagnation, which is Death, instead of Change which is Life. This same Jesus said He was the Bread of Life, he did not call Himself a Stone, though He did give that name to Peter, who denied Him, and it is strange that this Peter should be the Rock upon which the Church was built.

You will see how different is the interpretation of Christ's words when we consider Him as of the same Substance always, but not of the same Form. It is the miracle of the One Sub-

stance of the Sacrament that it is capable of undergoing an infinite variety of changes, exactly suited to the one who partakes of it. And so it is with the One Substance of the Universe, it is capable of changing in any direction, capable of extension in any category, under the influence of the Will, the Directing Force or Life Principle within it. In every man and every woman there is an individual expression of that Will. Each is unique in the Divine Consciousness, each divinely different, no two alike.

Now the important thing for us to remember in our studies of these Mysteries, is to look for living symbols, not dead symbols, if we are interested in finding the Truth. We must look, not for "stones" or for the lower ideals which are fixed and immovable, but for Ideals that are living and flexible, capable of transformation by means of Will, so that the creative process of life may go on unhampered.

It is the action of Will, or Life, on the one substance, which make it a Living Substance, capable of constant change, and Stone is the one thing which least symbolizes this truth of Nature's processes. Stone is the very lowest manifestation, in which we can see practically no Change throughout the Centuries.

To be Concluded.