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LIVING MANNA

LONDON AND LEAMINGTON
ADDRESSES

No. IV.

BY

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LONDON

S. W. PARTRIDGE & CO., PATERNOSTER ROW

DUBLIN: 10 D'OLIER STREET



PRICE ONE PENNY.

DUBLIN STEAM PRINTING COMPANY



LIVING MANNA.

DEUTERONOMY viii. 3.

“And He humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that He might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live.”

THERE were no cities, no places of abode, for Israel in the desert. They had no possessions. There were no fields, no corn or wine. All was one long-continued desert; and at times there was no water even that could be taken. Never were multitudes more helpless or dependent. A wanderer, looking on upon their condition, and seeing them, that their wants, without any human intervention, were supplied; that their raiment waxed not old upon them, neither did their foot swell through forty years,—might well ask how was it, or what had they? Ah! what, indeed! They had *God*,—a God who had taken them up for Himself, for His own chosen heritage. He had opened seas, and discomfited armies for them. He had

made the bitter sweet; palm trees and wells, rivers of water, and bread had He provided: He gave them angels' food.

Nothing more revealed what Israel was than the Desert. And nothing revealed *them*,—their sin, their need, their weakness,—but manifested also some fresh grace and power in God.

He suffered them to hunger, else had they not looked to *Him* for food; and else had He not fed them. He suffered them to fail and faint, else had He not shown His patience, and power, and grace. He *suffered* them to hunger, that He may meet that hunger, giving them the mighty's meat. He permitted it. Blessed permission! For hunger is sweet. Famine is dreadful; but, when food is at hand, how precious is hunger! And when He permitted them to hunger, it was that they may see and know more of Himself. He loved to be known and to be enjoyed. What ways of His did He teach unto Israel! His secret ways—the ways of His love, and patience, and grace. And now that it has been revealed, we have seen the end of the Lord in it—how merciful, and long-suffering, and gracious!

And "He humbled them." The effect of His grace was to humble them. As when Noah was in the ark, and saw all else in destruction, he was humbled at the thought of the grace that had spared

him. So Israel, after Egypt, or after the Red Sea, or when they saw that, on murmuring, instead of destruction there was manna; or there was water, or there was always a present help; they were ashamed that ever they had distrusted such a God, or ever provoked such a Friend. Thus is it with us:—

“The more Thy glories strike mine eye,
The humbler I shall lie.”

And is there nothing analogous to our condition in this, that He suffered them to hunger? Was not this the beginning of things in us? We felt as those who had no city, no home, no abiding place of rest or peace; nay, we had no rest, no peace. He suffered us to hunger. What used to please, ceased to do so any longer. The things that used to charm us most, ceased to charm us any more. The so-called pleasures of sin and of the world could not satisfy us; we tried and tried to be satisfied, but we failed. Ah! it was He who suffered us to hunger. He did so, nay, He does so, in love. And why? Because He wants us to feed only on *Him*; only from *Him*; to eat of *His* manna, to live on *His* love; yea, on the Son of His love, the true bread, the living manna, that came down from heaven. Beloved, many of you understand how, besides the hunger He created, He presented *Himself*. And this He does still. Nothing else can satisfy us.

Our affections want a *Person*. They cannot rest in a mere doctrine; not even in the Bible, unless it disclose *Him*, and we can say—"My Beloved is mine, and I am His." Oh, then, dear friends, how blessed! And it was when in want that He taught us this, and is still teaching us, in unnumbered ways of Himself, as we often sing:—

"In the desert God shall teach thee
What the God that thou hast found;
Patient, gracious, powerful, holy,
All His grace shall there abound."

But if He suffered them to hunger, it was, as we have said, that He Himself may feed them. He could not give that joy to another. Sweet the pain of hunger when He can come in and surprise us with His bread. Sweet the wound, for which the balm is His own grace and love. He feeds still His beloved with the finest of the wheat, and rains down manna from heaven: we eat angels' food. The angels find their highest delight in God; they live on Him; but to angels, where is there another such a feast for their joy as they find in the Son of His love. It is He who has revealed God; all whose fulness dwells in Him. It is He who has unveiled the loved secrets of His mind. He has given to principalities and powers an unveiled God. Hence they delight in Him; they find their

eternal food in Him. It is surely in some such view of Him as this that we sing:—

“ With ashes who would grudge to part,
When called on angels’ food to feast.”

And now, what was the manna with which He fed them when He humbled them and suffered them to hunger? and how does it bear on us? This is what is more especially before us. There is a striking reference to the glorious substance in this shadow of the past.

1. You will observe the *nature* of the manna. “*Fed thee with manna which thou knewest not.*” It was of deep meaning, like Him whose height and depth of love who can tell. When the children of Israel saw it, they said one to another, “It is manna,” or, as it is in the margin, “*What is it?*” for they wist not what it was. How could they? its essence and its power of life being far beyond their wisdom. One is reminded of the word given by the angel to the parents of Samson, when they asked, “What is thy name, that when thy sayings come to pass, we may do thee honour? And the angel of the Lord said, Why askest thou thus after my name, seeing it is *secret*” (Judges xiii. 17, 18), or “*wonderful*,”—the very word given in the grand description of His *whole*, great, name (Isaiah ix. 6), “*Unto us a child is born;*” there is the incarnation.

“*Unto us a son is given;*” this He was declared to be with power by the resurrection from the dead—more than mere man; He was from everlasting Son with the Father. Says Paul, “Who revealed His Son in me,” and with Him the Church, as a body with the head is associated; for Him we look, waiting for the *Son* from heaven. “*And his name shall be called Wonderful*” (*secret*). His wonders who can tell? God, yet man; human, yet Divine; infant of days, yet Ancient of days; on earth, yet could say, “who also is in heaven;” like Jacob’s ladder, the top in the glory, the foot in the desert, with the resting, weary pilgrim. “*Counsellor*” (wisdom); not only guiding, teaching, and directing us, but having our cause, not to try merely, but to carry on, with power and capacity, to a sure and successful issue. John speaks of Him as Advocate. “We have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous.” It is remarkable of an advocate, that he never pleads guilty, but the very opposite. Thus He, in Divine righteousness, can show that since He died for us, none can condemn. “*Mighty God, everlasting Father.*” The infidel, aiming a dart at His Godhead, says it is not “everlasting Father,” but “Father of the everlasting age,” which we accept as true; it supplies just what we want to complete His whole name. For though He is *God*, He is also the Father of

that blessed, glorious age yet to come, when, as "*Prince of peace*," He will reign in righteousness, and the whole earth will be filled with His glory.

Such is His *whole* name. Is it not wonderful? Well may we say, What is it? Very God and very man; man, that He might suffer, and die for sinners; and God, that He might satisfy. In Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. If we see Him as we shall in the glory, all the Godhead will be enshrined in Him; so that when we see Him, we shall see the Father. "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." How wonderful! In Him, as God-Man, will be *all* the fulness of God—God in Him, the Son in Him, the Holy Ghost in Him. The manifestation of the Eternal Essence and power will be everywhere throughout the universe; but "in Him DWELLETH all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." How this helps us in our expectation of heaven or paradise! "There no stranger God shall meet thee." He is wonderful! and we shall know Him, and love Him, and be loved by Him for ever; and find His love an exhaustless deep, an infinite height. Ah, beloved! in Him, in *Himself*, there are heights never to be scaled, depths never to be fathomed, a diameter never to be spanned. Observe—

2. The occasion on which it was given.—God took occasion of the sin and murmuring of Israel

to give them this heavenly food. They did not ask for it. They had come out of Egypt, and they asked Moses had he brought them out to kill them with hunger. Was it natural for God to do this? Was it according to His promise? What occasion was there for such a conclusion? God might, indeed, as a judgment on such murmuring, have left them to perish. But no; He takes occasion from such condition, and comes in in grace, and meets their necessity with manna. Why was this? Not surely that He may reward murmuring, but show His power and grace, in not only forgiving, but also in feeding them. This is a great truth. We know not why God permitted evil—why He allowed sin in its first existence; but we do know how He has turned it to His own purpose of glory. God, in His eternal grace and love, saw man in his sin, and found occasion, through man's sin, for manifesting His own wondrous glory. He takes occasion of the very depths to which the sinner was sunk to manifest the fulness in Himself. It was because of this Luther exclaimed,—“O blessed sin!” Not that sin was blessed; it is a very curse; but it gave God occasion to bring out resources which were needful to a full manifestation of Himself. He *needed* the sinner, so to speak, for this perfect manifestation. There were two things in God—holiness and grace; the one God's

hatred to sin was not only vindicated, but gloriously manifested, by His Son dying for sin on the cross; all God's claims of holiness have been met, and now grace is free to act. Marvellous grace! From what a depth does it lift us, and to what a height has it placed us, even far above all other heights! The height to which Christ is raised is the measure of our own. Mark—

3. The character of the manna.—The manna was essentially pure. It was “white, like coriander seed.” See the analogy here—the blessed Lord was “holy, harmless, undefiled,” without spot or taint in His precious person. It is a wrong doctrine that would touch the perfectness of Jesus. Many, alas! are submitting His person and doctrine, particularly His sufferings and death, to an analysis unwarranted by Scripture, and hurtful to the souls of God's people. Scripture on these is always simple, and let us not make it unsimple. We are told He was *holy, harmless, undefiled*. We are told that *He died* for our sins; that he bore our sins in His own body on the tree—that perfect spotless one!

Then the manna was very small, mere globules on the ground. “A small round thing, as small as the hoar-frost upon the ground.” None but the eye of a true Israelite could discern who Christ was; by all others He was passed undesired. There was

no beauty that they should desire Him, "As a root out of a dry ground, He had no form or comeliness." (Isaiah liii. 2.)

The manna, moreover, was as lowly in position as it could be without touching the earth, there was between it and the ground but the dew-drop, in which, as in a socket of silver, it rested. It partook of none of the impurities of the earth on which it fell. The Lord, though here in the midst of sinners, was Himself altogether separate from sinners. And He was lowly as He was pure. He was made in the fashion of a man. He humbled Himself. His position on earth was a lowly one. When men saw Him they said, is not that the son of Joseph and Mary? All-obscured the glory, though sometimes gleaming out as when He raised the dead; "A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." "He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." Mark, farther—

4. Its use.—It was for life; and for such it was to be gathered. When it came down it was all around for food. But one of two things must be done with it. As the Israelite stepped from his tent-door, he must either *gather the manna* or *trample upon it*; there was no third course. When a man hears Christ he must either receive Him or reject Him. Ah! the sinner will think of it—God forbid he should have to think of it when it is too late.

His position is just this, he must either take the gift of Christ for salvation, or trample Him under foot in rejection. And as no Israelite could say, I never heard of manna, never was told that it came for me—so you cannot say, I never heard of salvation, I was born a heathen, never heard of Christ. Ah! no, no! thousands and myriads have gathered the manna who heard no more of it than you. Many of them had less opportunity than you. But *they gathered it.*

This was the one *condition: it must be gathered;* and this could be done, not by the exalting, but by the humbling of self. The manna was not on the summit of things to be reached down, not on the mountain heights, nor on the tops of the stately palms, but it was low as the ground. Thus Israel, when the manna fell, had to stoop to gather it. You must let down the loftiness of your conception, your self-sufficiency; you must come down from your own doing. For you did not merit the manna, purchase it, earn it, labour for it. No, but you must take it or starve; take it as the gift of God, or die and perish without it. Do you understand? Alas! how very few do understand the gift of God in Christ Jesus, how that He is free for the chief of sinners. A stranger seeing the people gathering the manna might have said, *What is that?* Oh, they might reply, it is *secret*, it is *wonderful*;

we cannot tell you, it must be received to be known. But *whose* is it? It is ours, they answer. Yes, *mine*, says one, and *mine*, and *mine*, say others. What made it yours? *God* gave it. This, you see, is the "Jesus is **MINE**" doctrine. He is God's gift to the sinner. I take Him, *He is mine*.

"He my redemption is,
Wisdom and righteousness,
Life, light, and holiness,
Jesus is mine."

I as a sinner deserve to die—deserve death; God interposes and puts Christ before me, who has taken my death. This is simple. But how am I to possess Him? I am to possess Him by possessing Him, to have Him by having Him; that is, I am simply to take Him, adding nothing of my own.

"Nothing either great or small,
Nothing sinner, no;
Jesus did it, did it all,
Long, long ago."

But there is a further truth about the manna. On every sixth day it fell in double quantity, and on the seventh day there was none. The Israelite, therefore, gathered double quantity on the sixth day. In the seventh it was there with Him without being gathered. We are in the Saturday-eve of the world—the eve of millennial rest. On that Sabbath day there

will be one Lord Jesus, and His name one. It is now the evening before the glory. As the Lord said—"At even ye shall know [as we do now], but in the morning ye shall see the glory. How blessed! we shall be satisfied then! (Ps. xvii. 15.) Meanwhile, the Gospel is coming down in double quantity.

But one point more. The man who had gathered little lacked nothing, and the man who gathered much had nothing over. An Israelite might have said—

"I am weak and ill, I cannot leave my tent, I can only spend a few minutes gathering the manna; I wish I had more time. What shall I do?" He but half fills his vessel. This is wonderful—he has as much as if nothing had happened. Another man says—"Well, I will have a good supply; I will take three vessels." When they eat they have not more than they want; so that he who gathered little and he who gathered much were on the same footing. Do you understand that? I do. When the dying thief had only a moment to gather the manna, what he got was *Christ*—what Paul got was simply *Christ*. It is not the amount of time we have or the quality of our faith, or our experience. What the dying thief embraced was the *Son of God*, and instant blessedness, and what the very highest capacity of saint will ever receive throughout all eternity will be the same God manifested through

the Son. The manna was gathered according to the capacity for receiving it—fathers, young men, little children. Ah! beloved, if you can only look on Jesus; just get the eye of faith on Jesus; there is your soul's salvation;—do you understand it? But where is He now? He is not here now, though, blessed be His name, He is here formed in us the hope of glory. Yet as to His person, He is in the presence of God for us. The two truths were set forth in the manna. "Take a pot," said the Lord to Moses (Ex. xvi. 33), "and put an omer full of manna therein, and *lay it up before the Lord.*" What is this but Christ? who is our life, and our life is hid with Christ in God.

Beloved, have you this manna? Have you this life? Are you simply living on God, relying on Him for salvation, and feeding on His Word.

When I was at the death-bed lately of a beloved saint, I asked him what message he had for his friends, for he often mingled in scenes like these; he replied—"Tell them that the truth which you so often preach is the only thing for a dying man, namely, that God is to be taken simply at His word. That is sufficient. God has said that believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, we are saved." Ah! dear friends, what have any of us but this—God, His word: living or dying there is nothing for us but this. Being saved is not

religiousness, but knowing *God*, living on *God*. The question is, what has God said of me, and of Himself? Has he ever travelled—come, into my soul! Do I know what, from eternity, has been his thought of me? Ah! He might say of my soul, as seen from His Word, “I wanted you in Heaven; I wanted you at my table—special want of my heart—that table without you would not be perfect. I wanted to have you there righteously, meet for the scene, with the best robe; I wanted you with sin put away, and in my highest, greatest love.” Oh, is it not wonderful? At resurrection, we wake up into all His thought of love. And you and I are to believe. The seed of the woman has been bruised, then we have not to take the bruising. Salvation was preached to Adam; the same glorious salvation I have preached to you to-day—a salvation to be taken, received on the testimony of the Word of God.

We have no conception of the importance of a single utterance of God—no conception of what hangs upon it. You know what hangs on the single utterance of a man. When the lord of the soil says to his steward, “I do not want you more,” there is in that one word a severance; with the judge, death is in the word. How much hangs upon the simple word of man, but oh, how much more on the word of God! And you are to

be tried in the last day by every word of God: How the Lord Himself honoured *the Word*. Satan, as you may remember, entered the lists with the Lord, who went into the wilderness to understand the power of the tempter. Moses went to the wilderness to meet God: the Lord Jesus went to be tempted of the devil. Satan, accordingly, raises the question of His Godhead—seeks to cast a suspicion on His Sonship. But how does the Lord meet him?—by merely saying He *was* the Son of God? Ah, no! though He might have done that. It was as if He had said, the last time I heard my Father, He said, “Thou ART My Son.” He had just come up out of the waters of baptism, and, said Jesus, “It is written, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God;” and God had just said, “Thou art My Son: I have begotten Thee.” What a rock was this for Him who was son of a carpenter, and who was born of a woman! What a rock against Satan. One of David’s mighty men was famous for hurling a stone. He knew how to handle it, and had power to use it against a foe. What a stone was this for the greater than David! How did He level at a blow the enemy at His feet! God, beloved, has spoken to you, and He will try you by these words. He has

given His Son to die for you; He came forth in grace and mercy to save. If you place your whole hope and confidence in Him, He declares of you that you are saved. What a word is this!—"He that believeth on the Son of God hath everlasting life." Oh, what a word for you, sinner, to listen to this day! How responsible are you! If you question it, and so question it that you reject it, it will be a millstone about your neck, dragging you down to deepest destruction. Instead, however, of your questioning if it is true, if you receive it, you have the Word of God assuring you that you are saved—that you have everlasting life—that you shall no more come into judgment. Believe it, "man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." Here is the word I have got—"He that heareth My Word and believeth on Him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but is passed from death unto life." (John v. 24.)

But here, again, is another word, which, if a man understand and believe, he understands and believes the Gospel, and is saved. "But now, once in the end of the world, hath He (Christ) appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for Him

shall He appear the second time, without sin, unto salvation." (Heb. ix. 27, 28.)

Beloved, do you know Christ thus? If you do, oh, what living manna! what food for your souls! Do you know Him as dead for our sins, and as raised from the dead because our sins were put away? Do you know Him as One who, when He comes again, will come *without* sin? Ah, this is the Gospel. No sin on Him when He comes! He had sin on Him when He died. He had it *not* when He rose. He now knows or bears it no more. This is an immense truth to see. It is simply the Gospel, which, if any soul can see and believe, that soul is saved. Do you see this? What rest to the conscience! Christ in heaven *without* sin. And when He appears a second time, it will be *without* sin. What would make any of us afraid of Him? What gives us alarm at His coming? What but our sins? Just as it is the debt he owes which makes the debtor afraid to meet his creditor. But if the debt be gone, the fear is gone. How blessed to know this! But in our case *it is gone*, both the debt and the fear. It is, in fact, the Gospel, that when we see Him there will be no sin to bring us into judgment; no death to follow upon sin; no hell to follow upon death. Do you understand?

Never forget that sin, death, and judgment all

stand or fall together. If there be sin, there must be death, and if death, judgment. But they all pass away in the death of Christ. "As it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for Him (which all believers are supposed to do, it being their natural attitude as such), shall He appear the second time, without sin, unto salvation." The Lord on the cross strikes at the power of the first of these. By death He takes the doom of sin, so that to those who look for Him, who are believers, instead of death, and what would otherwise follow, judgment, when He appears, it will be neither of these, but unto salvation—complete, full, eternal salvation. And we shall see Him, and be like Him, and be for ever with Him!—*with Himself!* We shall be for ever with the Lord.

Ah, then, beloved, it will be as the old corn of the land; we shall see Him and know Him, not merely as *man*, as Son of *Man* who died for us and whose flesh is meat indeed, and whose blood is drink indeed, but as *Son*; the Son as He is and ever was in all His own essential and eternal glory. As He said—"the glory that I had with Thee before the world was." He had a glory from all ages His own. And all that, as Son, He can give us He will. This we have, even now, in spirit, in

the wilderness; it is ours as in the heavenly places in Him. For in Him the wilderness is passed and Jordan over, and we are planted in the land.

Meanwhile, in the wilderness it is we have the manna we daily need—manna on which to feed continually. The Israelites gathered it *in the morning*—the first thing ere the world and care had come in. Oh, if first filled with Christ, what strength and what provision for the day! But if no daily manna, you will have no power for service, no walk with God, no communion. It is every day we want the manna, every day we must feed on Christ; He is our daily need. We cannot live upon past attainments, or past experiences, however precious. The manna of the last week, if laid up instead of gathering it each day, would not do. We need, daily, a feeding on Christ, on His truth, on Himself. This is our wilderness life. It was in the wilderness Israel had wilderness provision—their Elims, with their palms and springs. It was there they were led by the pillar of cloud and fire. It was there they eat the manna. But it was in Canaan beyond the Red Sea, and beyond Jordan, they eat the old corn of the land. Thus is it beloved friends with us.

No more the sea of death
'Twixt us and Canaan rolls;
But all its gloomy waters lie
'Twixt Egypt and our souls.

That place of death once past,
None tread again its shore ;
With Christ, who trod its deepest depths,
We live to die no more.

We pass'd, with sprinkled blood,
From out of Egypt's gloom ;
And death, the source of all our life,
Became th' usurper's doom.

We now have Elim rest,
Where living waters rise—
Blest fruit of Him who died our death,
Who all our wants supplies.

And we have manna now,
Blest bread of God, divine—
God's cloud we have to guide by day,
His light by night to shine.

Our God is always near,
He keeps us in the way ;
He *suffers* us to want, that He
May feed us day by day.

This is our daily need,
As pilgrims here below,
But there in heaven, through Christ, our Head,
The Eternal SON we know.

As once on Canaan's side,
O'er Jordan's emptied strand,
The hosts of Israel loved to know
The old corn of the land ;

So we in heavenly rest
Safe planted in the land,
Feed on the love, and peace, and joy,
Which are at God's right hand.

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But desert palms and springs,
However loved and blest,
Are not the long, remaining things,
Of our eternal rest.

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