

The Miraculous Rain of Quails.

A BIBLE STORY.

"And there went forth a wind from the Lord and brought quails from the sea, and let them fall by the camp, as it were a day's journey on this side and as it were a day's journey on the other side, round about camp, and as it were two cubits on the face of the earth.

"And the people stood up all that day and all that night and all the next day, and they gathered the quails; he that gathered least, gathered ten homers; and they spread them all abroad for themselves round about the camp.

"And while the flesh was yet between their teeth, ere it was chewed, the wrath of the Lord was kindled against the people, and the Lord smote them with a very great plague." (Numbers xi, 31-32-33).

What a simple little story, on the face of it, but what a monstrous one when we divest it of its sacred character and examine it in the light of present understanding.

In order to explain the matter more fully (as the ordinary reader does not look up a reference) let it be understood that the Israelites had been wandering in the wilderness for about one year, and had been subsisting on "manna." While it is not known just what this manna was, the word is derived from the Hebrew "Man Hu," meaning "What is it?" It is described as a small round thing, like coriander seed, white and tasting like wafers and honey.

In the Arabian desert near Mount Sinai we find, at the present day, an insect whose English name is manna. It has a proboscis like a mosquito; with this it punctures the rind of the Tamarind tree and the sap, or gum, runs out, hardens and drops to the ground. This must be gathered before sunrise the next morning as it melts with the heat of the sun. The natives of the desert near Mount Sinai believe this to be the veritable manna upon which the Israelites fed, and in emulation, gather and eat quantities of it.

Other writers as stoutly maintain that it was a species of mushroom, but this idea is not sustained to any great degree.

In either case it was not very fattening, and any gourmand can sympathize with the Israelites when, after one year's experience, they "sighed for the fish, cucumbers, onions, leeks, garlick and flesh pots of Egypt."

Under those conditions the anger of the Lord was kindled against them and they were condemned to eat flesh, which proved to be quails, for thirty days. When we note the failures that have been made in attempting to eat thirty quails in thirty days, we can realize the terrible punishment this entailed. After this, occurred the rain of quails of which our quotation speaks.

The quantity of quails that fell at this time was something enormous! Let us throw away all superstitious awe and examine the story as we would was it told by some returned traveler of today.

We are told that the quails fell "round about camp, a day's journey on each side": that is, they covered a circle around the camp having a day's journey as its radius or two days' journey as its diameter, supposing the center of the camp to have been taken as the starting point, and two cubits high on the face of the earth.

The Oxford bible says a day's journey was 33 miles 384 feet, and that a cubit is 1.824 feet or a little over 21½ inches.

That would give us a circle of 66 miles 768 feet in diameter, covered with quails to a depth of practically 44 inches. Why the people had to gather them when this was the case is a conundrum. Yet we are told they did and "he who gathered least gathered ten homers". According to the same authority, a homer is 8 bushels, consequently he who gathered least gathered 80 bushels, and evidently others gathered more, for if they had not it would not say "he who gathered least".

As they had instructions not to gather any more manna than was necessary for their subsistence until it would come again, it is reasonable to suppose that they gathered only enough quails to last them during the 30 days they had been condemned to eat flesh. Are we then to suppose that they ate this enormous quantity in that time? Are we to suppose that each member consumed 80 bushels of quails in 30 days? 2 2-3 bushels a day?

It has been estimated that a bushel of quails contains 25 pounds of solid meat, besides the bones, feathers and other refuse. Taking this as our basis every person would be obliged to eat an even ton, 2,000 pounds of solid meat, in 30 days, or at the rate of 66 2-3 pounds per day. No wonder it made them sick!

There were 603,550 fighting men in this caravan. Take the minimum quantity each one gathered and they gathered the enormous quantity of 48,284,000 bushels of quails. This would supply the entire caravan with about 13 pounds of solid meat each day. But if the entire caravan gathered them the figures would be as above stated.

There are supposed to have been about 3,000,000 people in this caravan. Imagine them, 603,550 fighting men, besides the women and children (of course, the Levites or priests looked on and did not work) wading in quails up to their waists gathering them and then "spreading them abroad for themselves round about camp". Where did they spread them? The ground was already covered for a distance of 33 miles 384 feet in every direc-

tion to a depth of 44 inches; and if this was the case why the necessity of gathering them at all?

But to return to our narrative. Can you conceive of the enormous quantity they gathered? If but the fighting men gathered them, they gathered 48,284,000 bushels. If each one of the 3,000,000 people gathered 80 bushels of quails, and the passage says they did, they gathered the enormous quantity of 240,000,000 bushels. Can you conceive what an enormous quantity that is? Let us reduce it to figures that can be more readily understood. A good big wagon load is 40 bushels. If loaded on wagons at that rate, it would load 600,000,000 wagons which, stretched out in a straight line, allowing two rods for each wagon, would reach one and one-half times around the earth at the equator, or a distance of 37,500 miles.

We are told that they "spread them all abroad for themselves round about camp". The difficulty has already been stated, but supposing they cleared a space one mile square for this purpose, the quantity they gathered would fill it to a height of 1,071 feet 4 inches.

The amount that fell was simply appalling. Imagine a circle 66 miles 768 feet in diameter, covered with quails to a depth of 44 inches! The human mind cannot begin to conceive the number. Reduced to bushels, it is still too large for finite comprehension, for the figures are 280,823,880,045 bushels; load them into wagons, and it would load 7,028,597,001; stretch them out in a straight line, as before, and they would reach a distance equal to 1,755 1-7 times around the earth at the equator; load them into freight cars, 600 bushels to the car, and they would load 468,049,800 cars; make them up into trains of 20 cars each and they would make 23,401,990 trains; allowing that 45 feet would be required for each car and engine, they would make a string of trains 4,188,424 miles in length; if these trains were going at the speed of our finest express trains, 60 miles an hour, it would require 7 years, 353 days, 15 hours, 4 minutes for them to pass a given point. But if they traveled at the rate of 15 miles an hour, which is the customary speed of freight trains, it would require 31 years, 319 days, 12 hours and 16 minutes to pass a given point. The string of engines necessary to haul these trains would reach around the earth at the equator 8 times or be 200,000 miles in length.

Put this quantity of quails into perfectly square piles and they would cover two sections of land a mile deep and a third one 1,975 feet 7 inches. In other words, we would have two cubical piles 5,280 feet in every direction and another with a base 5,280 feet square and 1,975 feet 7 inches high.

Just think of it! Certain classes of people are trying to make us think that unless we believe a whole string of such stories we are everlastingly damned; yet it is a physical impossibility that such a thing could have been! Take all the quails that have existed since time began and they would fall far short of the required number. Are quails aquatic birds? If not, why did they come from the sea?—[Big Bible Stories.

LITTLE STORIES.

Who Made Pa?

Sunday School Teacher.—"Yes, children, God made us all."

Jimmy.—"No'm he didn't."

Horrified Teacher.—"What?"

Jimmy.—"God didn't make my pa. Ma says she's made him what he is."

An Alibi.

"Who led the children of Israel out of the wilderness?" asked the Sunday school superintendent, as his eyes rested on a new scholar.

"'Twasn't me," replied the boy; "my folks just moved out here from Missouri last week."

Might Get Wet.

An old scotchwoman was dying. The storm was raging with it—the wind howling and the rain dashing against the window panes. The friends with the doctor were gathered around her bed.

"I maun dee, doctor, I maun dee," said the sick woman.

"Ay, ay, I'm mickle feart ye are gaun," the doctor replied.

"Weel, weel, the Lord's will be done," his patient responded; "but it's an awfu' nicht to be gaun skirling through the clouds!"

Patriotism and Religion.

A lady who teaches in a mission Sunday school tells of an experience she had with a youngster making his first appearance. She had put him through a half hour or more of instruction in the rudimentary principles, for he was entirely lacking in information on that point, and to test him was reviewing her work with him.

"Now," she said, "tell me again who made the world and all that is in it?"

"God did," replied the boy, with commendable promptitude.

"God can do everything, can't he?" she asked again.

The boy hesitated a moment.

"I don't believe he could lick Dewey," he answered, and his teacher sat silent, between her religion and her patriotism. It was n't her time to say anything if she didn't want to lose that boy forever, and she had wit enough to let it go at that.—[Washington Star.