

Feeding the Multitude.*

THERE are two accounts in the New Testament of miraculously feeding a vast multitude of people with an exceedingly small amount of food. The first we find in Matt. 14:15-21, Mark 6:35-44, Luke 9:12-17, John 6:5-13. The second will be found in Matt. 15:32-39, Mark 8:1-10.

Jesus went across the sea of Galilee to a desert place where he was followed by a vast multitude. He healed their sick and in the evening the disciples came to him and entreated him to send the multitude away in order that they might go and get food. But Jesus said they need not depart, and instructed the disciples to feed them.

The disciples told him that all the food they had was five loaves and two small fishes. They were told to bring them to him, and he commanded the multitude to sit down. They sat down in ranks of fifty and one hundred. He then took the five loaves and two fishes, "broke" them and gave them to the disciples, who passed them around among the people. The multitude ate all they wanted and the disciples gathered up twelve baskets full of fragments.

"And they that had eaten were about 5000 men, beside women and children" (Matt. 14:21).

This is the substance of the four reports of the first feeding.

Wheat flour was a luxury in Palestine, and their bread consisted of little cakes made of barley meal. It was mixed in a kind of trough, was not leavened, and five of these cakes was a very limited supply for five men, without women and children. Yet this was all the food there was among this vast multitude.

If there were 5000 men, besides women and children, it is reasonable to estimate their entire number at not less than 10,000. How strange that so many people should go to a desert place, many miles from home, not knowing where they were going, or how long they would be gone, and, last but not least, without taking anything to eat with them.

The people had been there all day and it was then late in the evening, and they would have been quite hungry from their long journey and outdoor exercise. Yet they were all fed by the disciples from the five loaves and two small fishes. If they had done this, it would have required not less than five tons of food—10,000 pounds—as an average of one pound each would be little enough for hungry people.

The twelve disciples would have had to serve 833½ persons each. If they waited upon one each minute, it would have taken over fourteen

hours' steady work, and in that time Jesus would have been obliged to "break" five tons of food. Then they must have passed around where the people sat and gathered up the fragments that were not eaten, of which there were twelve baskets full.

These baskets were small ones that were carried on the arm, and held probably about a peck. As the original supply of food would not have filled one of the baskets half full, they fed 5000 men and doubtless as many women and children, giving them all they wanted to eat, and had about twenty-five times as much when they got through as they had when they started.

But how did the people get there? The Bible says they knew where Jesus was going, and when they saw him "take ship" they ran along and got ahead of him. The sea of Galilee is about eight miles wide by fifteen long, and from all accounts there was a trip half way around it for the people to make on foot, then up through the mountains to the vicinity of Bethsaida (Julius), a good day's walk for the best of them and more than that for nearly all.

It takes considerable calculation on the part of electric railroad managers to handle an extra crowd of 10,000 people. They have cars in plenty, men who are trained to their work, and come and go like clockwork; but frequently, when an extra crowd of 10,000 people are to be handled, the patience of the crowd and the good nature of the managers has a severe strain to endure. How, then, did such a multitude, without previous arrangements being made, congregate at a place from one to three days' walk from their homes, and how could they have been so provident as to go into the desert without food or any knowledge of how it was to be obtained?

The most remarkable part of the story is that the people congregated in that desert place without food or any idea how they were to get it. Then that five loaves and two small fishes supplied them with all the food they wanted to eat and left twenty-five times as much as there was in the first place, is a little too much for the plain, matter-of-fact thinker of the nineteenth century to accept without more proof than has thus far been produced.

But this is not all. Scarcely had the echoes of the first deed passed away when we read of another. This time there were but 4000 men, besides women and children, to be fed.

The location of this feat was supposed to be Genesareth. This is a good place to say that everything is "supposed to be" in Biblical history. The books are "supposed to have been written" by some one "at about such a time". Nothing

definite about it. There is no manuscript or part of a manuscript of the New Testament that was written during the first three centuries, as is admitted by all Christian scholars. Indeed, it is doubtful if there is a single word of the New Testament in existence that was written previous to the twelfth century A. D. There is no evidence that either Matthew, Mark, Luke or John wrote a word of the gospels bearing their names. Even "Helps to the Study of the Bible" says, "This was supposed to have been written by ———, and probably about ———." It is not claimed that a single word of the New Testament was written until twenty to 300 years after the events are said to have taken place, and then no one knows who wrote it.

The Old Testament is in much the same condition. The internal evidence shows that Moses had nothing to do with the writing of the Pentateuch; Joshua did not write the book that bears his name; Judges was written 500 years after the Judges had mouldered into dust. In fact, the scholars of the higher criticism claim that the oldest book was written not earlier than 600 B. C. In addition to this, in most cases even the compilers of the books are unknown.

It will not seem strange, then, if I repeat, its location was supposed to have been Genesareth. It was about twenty to thirty miles from the scene of the first feeding. In this case we are told that Jesus had compassion on the people because they had continued with him three days and had nothing to eat. They were again instructed to sit down, and the disciples hunted up "seven loaves and a few small fishes" and they were fed. They also ate all they wanted, the disciples gathered up the fragments and they were seven baskets full. They were large packing baskets; not the small reticules used in the first case.

A person who had been without food for three days and then ate all he wanted would eat not less than two pounds of food. That would make 16,000 pounds—eight tons—of food to feed the multitude. All made out of seven loaves and a few small fishes.

It would have been quite a strain on the disciples to have served an average of 1333½ pounds of food each to the multitude, as they had to feed an average of 666½ people each. One per minute would make eleven hours' steady work, serving at the rate of over 120 pounds of food per hour. Any one who has acted as a waiter can appreciate the job.

Again we have the conundrum of how the people got there and how they got away. It must not be confounded with our own country, as they had no steam or electric cars, nothing but to travel on foot and by slow animals. In this section,

Palestine is a mass of mountains, hills and desert places; it would be as great a miracle to get the people there and away again as it was to feed them.

Again we are carried back to the hero worship. Again we find ourselves face to face with the people who ascribed such remarkable powers to their leaders. In the Apocryphal New Testament are a number of wonderful stories of Jesus. According to one of them, he was playing with a lot of children who were making clay images of birds and animals. He made some and they walked and flew off. Of course the Apocryphal New Testament is not considered canonical, but as the canon was decided by a lot of bishops (who could not agree among themselves) by a majority vote, one is as likely to be the true one as the other. Luther and others claimed books were accepted that had no right in the canon. If they put books in that have no right there, who knows but they left out some that should have gone in?

Like some of the other stories, it illustrates the natural inclination of man towards the mysterious; not only in past ages, but up to and including the present time.

Evil Effects of Smoking.

Dr. E. Stivers gives some instructive statistics illustrative of the effect of tobacco on the development of the young. From the measurements of 187 of the class of 1891, Yale, he found that the non-smokers gained in weight during the college course 10.4 per cent. more than the regular smokers, and 6.6 per cent. more than the occasional smokers. In height the non-users of tobacco increased 24 per cent. more than the regular users and 12 per cent. more than the occasional. In increase of chest girth the non-user had an advantage of 26.7 per cent. and 22 per cent., and an increase of lung capacity of 77.5 per cent. and 49 per cent., respectively.

These observations, with respect to the dwarfing effects of tobacco, are corroborated by observations on the class of 1891, Amherst, made by Dr. Edward Hitchcock. He found that in weight non-smokers increased during their course 24 per cent. more than the smokers; in increase in height they surpassed them 37 per cent.; in gain of chest 42 per cent., and in gain of lung capacity 75 per cent. Again, in France, the difference between the students in the polytechnic schools who smoked cigarettes and those who did not, in scholarship, as shown by their respective class standings, was so great that the government prohibited absolutely the use of tobacco in all government schools.

Dr. Stivers says, speaking of the effect of tobacco on the moral nature: "The use of tobacco has a peculiarly demoralizing effect on the moral nature of the young. In addition to making boys tired, stupid, and lazy, it makes them irritable, perverse, careless of the rights and feelings of others, besides, in many instances, leading to lying and even stealing.—[Popular Science.

*From "Big Bible Stories", by permission of the author, W. H. Bach, Lily Dale, N. Y.