

FEEDING THE HUNGRY.

– FEB. 19. – JOHN 6:1-14. –

"I am the bread of life." – John 6:35.

"AFTER these things," says John; and various connected incidents show that it was nearly a year after the miracle and discourse of our last lesson. It is well understood that the Gospel of John does not claim to be a full record of our Lord's sayings and doings. It would appear to have been written after the other Gospels. John evidently recollected matters which, in whole or in part, had been overlooked by the others, and his Gospel sets forth some very interesting incidents and prayers and discourses, whose omission would have been a serious loss to us. Thus we see how God operates in various ways to accomplish his purpose. He could have miraculously used any one of the Evangelists to give the full and detailed account, but he chose rather to allow each to state himself in his own manner, and to supply the details in four narratives, in preference to one.

This very arrangement, indeed, has led to a greater search of the Scriptures, and has thus brought the various details more pointedly to the attention of the Lord's people. We are to remember, however, that, altho a liberty was allowed, the matter was nevertheless under divine care and supervision, to the intent that the records should not err in their statement. Our Lord's promise we may rely upon, *viz.*, that whatsoever the apostles bound or loosed on earth, is bound or loosed in heaven, so completely were they under divine direction and protection against deception and misstatement.

News had just reached our Lord and his disciples that John the Baptist had been beheaded, and "when Jesus heard of it he departed thence by ship into a desert place apart." (Matt. 14:13.) Our Lord withdrew, probably in part to have an opportunity for private

meditation and conference with his disciples, who undoubtedly would be greatly agitated by this news, and needed his calming influence and assurance that Herod could have no power over him or them except such as might be permitted of the Father. The wilderness place to which they went was just outside the boundary of Herod's dominion, near Bethsaida. And the fact that our Lord's conference with his disciples had a pacifying and strengthening effect is evidenced by their return that same night to Galilee, Herod's territory.

It was while they were thus quietly aside, on the mountain slopes on the north-eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee, that they beheld "a great company coming toward them." The largeness of the company is accounted for by the fact that it was near the time of the Feast of the Passover, and according to custom large numbers of the religiously inclined were on their pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

From the other Gospels we learn that the day was spent in healing the sick of the multitude, and preaching to them the things pertaining to the Kingdom of **[R2435 : page 48]** God, and that it was toward evening that they were miraculously fed on five barley loaves and two small fishes, – and had twelve baskets of fragments remaining. (Matt. 14:15; Mark 6:34; Luke 9:11.) It is remarkable that the Gospels do not parade our Lord's generosity and kindness, but content themselves with recording the simple facts: yet these facts give ample testimony to those who have eyes to see, showing them in him "the glory of the only begotten of the Father, *full* of grace and truth." Here, for instance, we note the fact that he specially sought rest and privacy with his disciples, yet when he saw the multitude he was "moved with compassion toward them:" he could not refrain from giving them his vitality in curing their ailments, and pouring in the oil and wine of truth, and satisfying their hungers and thirstings of heart with the good promises of the Kingdom, and finally providing them natural food. And such will be the spirit of all the Lord's followers, in proportion as they have learned of him, and become partakers of the spirit of his holiness. Their delight will be,

not in self-gratification, but chiefly in "doing good unto all men as they have opportunity, *especially to the household of faith.*" "So shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one another." – Gal. 6:10; John 13:35.

John's narrative, in connection with those of the other Evangelists, shows us that our Lord counseled with the apostles respecting what should be done with the multitude, and that their general advice was that they be sent away, that they might find lodging and victuals in the nearest villages. The people themselves seem to have been so entranced with the good tidings that they entirely forgot their own necessities. Our Lord specially addressed Philip, respecting the matter, because his home was in the neighboring city of Bethsaida.

The general conclusion of all the apostles was that the feeding of such a multitude was beyond any reasonable hope of theirs. And it must have been with bewilderment that they obeyed the Lord's direction to seat the people in orderly companies, and proceeded to distribute their scanty supply. All had sufficient to satisfy their hunger, and the fragments that remained, gathered into the haversacks (mistranslated baskets) in which the twelve apostles carried their provisions, were a good supply for their future necessities. Thus did our Lord additionally teach economy, frugality. The disciples and the multitude would be very likely to draw the inference that, where there was such power to create and to multiply, there would be no necessity for frugality. The course pursued by our Lord is a valuable lesson for our time also. It implies that those who receive of the Lord's bounty should be none the less appreciative of it, and careful in its use. According to the divine arrangement, it would seem to be the proper thing that wilful waste, sooner or later, brings corresponding woful want.

The Lord's people should be careful to avoid wasting, in earthly food and temporal matters, not because of selfishness, and a desire

to hold and accumulate, but, as the Apostle explains, "that ye may have to give" – that thus we may have opportunity to be imitators of our Heavenly Father, who is continually giving to the needy, some of his blessings being bestowed alike upon the worthy and unworthy. (Eph. 4:28.) The same principle applies to some extent in spiritual matters. We may partake of our spiritual blessings to our full satisfaction, and with thankfulness; but we are not to waste spiritual privileges because they are God's free gifts. Rather are we to prize every spiritual morsel and to gather up in store for future needs of ourselves and others. The memory is our "basket," our haversack, and divine provision is so bountiful that every disciple may gather his basket full.

The same generous heart which had compassion upon the multitudes, declaring that they were as sheep having no shepherd, and following blind guides, and about to fall with them into the ditch of Israel's great calamity, and who taught them, healed them and fed them, is the same yesterday, to-day and forever. We may know, therefore, that he is to-day looking with **[R2436 : page 48]** sympathetic compassion upon the multitudes of so-called "Christendom." He sees that the great doctors of finance, of sociology and of theology, tho thoroughly blind and disputing with each other respecting the way, are nevertheless leading the people on to the great time of trouble that is nearing. He beholds the multitudes, dissatisfied with the husks of human tradition and philosophy, hungering and thirsting after righteousness (truth), yet blinded from seeing it, by prejudice and superstition, and led of error by priestcraft and human subserviency. He sees the dark night of trouble approaching, but before sending the people away he instructs all who are his disciples to supply them with something to eat – with spiritual food, with truths pertaining to the Kingdom, which will afford them some strength and some encouragement during the dark hour of that "time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation."

The Lord has already made provision sufficient in quantity and variety, under his blessing; and he bids each of his specially consecrated ones to have faith, and to go forth in the distributing of the food, trusting the result to him. Brethren and sisters, let us be energetic in handing forth the bread of life, the "meat in due season," to the multitude, – to whoever is hungry enough to desire to partake. Those who thus distribute will find in the end – their own vessels full.
