

Poetry.

SPEAK GENTLY.

Speak gently! aye speak gently all,
Nor cause a sigh or tear,
Or painful feeling in the breast,
Throughout our journey here.
Speak gently! time is never long,
And short may be our stay;
Then let us strew with gentle words
Love's flow'rs upon our way.

Speak gently to each child you see,
And kindly do them greet;
And if instruction you'd impart,
Do it with accents sweet;
Speak gently! E'en if they should live
To see a future day,
There's trouble yet for them to meet;
Then cheer them on their way.

Speak gently to the young in life,
Nor grieve the buoyant mind:
There's nothing chills the heart so much
As words that are unkind.
Speak gently! it will pleasure give,
Tho' bright their hopes 'mongst men,
But should their path be overcast,
Oh! pray speak gently then.

Speak gently to the old in years—
Their race is nearly run;
Then try with kind words if you can
To gild their setting sun.
Speak gently! tho' their ways and whims
Are often strange to see,
Rememb'ring that in future years
Your ways as strange may be.

Speak gently to the wand'ring ones;
Be kind in word and deed;
Quench not the flax by tones unkind,
Nor break the bruised reed.
Speak gently! and perchance your word
May bring to mind their youth;
Then try with kindness and with love
To lead their thoughts to truth.

Speak gently to the poor on earth:
How few and far the flow'rs
That bloom upon their path in life,
Compar'd with those on ours!
Speak gently to the toiling man;
Let no harsh sounds be heard;
Surely he has enough to bear,
Without an unkind word.

Speak gently! Why with anger spread
Sorrows upon our path;
Without a peevish word or look,
Each life its troubles hath.
Speak gently! Oh that all would guard
The words their lips let fall!
We know not what our influence is;
Oh, then speak gently all!

LETTERS FROM THE HON. JOHN QUINCY ADAMS TO HIS SON, ON THE BIBLE AND ITS TEACHINGS.

LETTER IX AND LAST.

The fourth and last point of view to which I proposed to offer you some general observations upon the Scriptures, was with reference to literature; and the first remark that presents itself is, that the five books of Moses are the most ancient monuments of written language now extant in the world; the book of Job is nearly of the same date, and by many of the Jewish and Christian commentators is thought to have been written by Moses.

The employment of alphabetical characters to represent all the articulations of the human voice, is the greatest invention that ever was compassed by human genius. Plato says "that it was the discovery of either of a god or a man divinely inspired." The Egyptians ascribed it to Thot, whom the Greeks afterward worshiped under the name of Hermes. This is, however, a fabulous origin. That it was an Egyptian invention there is little doubt, and it was a part of that learning of the Egyptians in all of which we are told "Moses was versed." It is probable that when Moses wrote, this act was, if not absolutely recent, of no very remote invention. There was but one copy of the law written in a book, it was deposited in the ark of the covenant, and was read aloud once in seven years, to all the people at their general assembly, in the feast of the tabernacles. There was one other copy of the law written upon stone, erected on Mount Ebal. It does not appear that there existed any other copies. In process of time the usage of reading it thus must have been dropped, and the monument upon Mount Ebal must have perished; for in the reign of Josiah, about 800 years afterward, the book of the law was found in the temple. How long it had been lost is not expressly told; but from the astonishment and consternation

of Josiah upon hearing the book read, its contents must long have been forgotten, so that scarcely a tradition of them remained. We are indeed told that when the ark of the covenant was deposited in the temple of Solomon, there was nothing in the ark save the two tables which Moses put therein at Horeb.

The two tables contained not the whole law, but the ten commandments; the book of the law was therefore no longer in the ark, at the dedication of Solomon's temple; that is, about 500 years after the law was given, and 300 before the book was found by Hezekiah the high priest in the 18th year of Josiah. From these circumstances, as well as from the expedients used by Moses and Joshua for preserving the ceremonial law and the repeated covenant between God and the people, it is observed that the art and practice of writing was extremely rare, and that very few of the people were even taught to read; that there were few books extant, and of those few only single copies; the arts of writing, speaking and thinking, with their several modifications of grammar, rhetoric and logic, were never cultivated among the Hebrews, as they were (though not till a thousand years later than Moses) among the Greeks.

Philosophical research and the spirit of analysis appeared to have belonged among the ancient nations exclusively to the Greeks. They studied language as a science, and from the discoveries they made in this pursuit, resulted a system of literary compositions founded upon logical deductions. The language of the ancient writers was not constructed upon the foundation of abstruse science; it partakes of the nature of all primitive languages, which is almost entirely figurative, and in some degree of the character of primitive writing and hieroglyphics. We are not told from what materials Moses compiled the book of Genesis, (which contains the history of creation and of 300 years succeeding it, which terminates three generations prior to the birth of Moses himself); whether he had it altogether from tradition, or whether he collected it from the more ancient written or printed memorials. The account of the creation, of the fall of man, and all the antediluvian part of the history, carries strong internal evidence of having been copied or (if I may express myself) translated from hieroglyphic or symbolical record. The story is of the most perfect simplicity, the discourses of the persons introduced are given as if taken down verbatim from their mouths, and the narrative is scarcely any thing more than the connecting link of the discourses; the genealogies are given with great precision, and this is one of the most remarkable peculiarities of the Old Testament. The rest is all figurative; the rib, the garden, the tree of life and the knowledge of good and evil, the apple, the serpent, are all images which seem to indicate a hieroglyphic origin.

All the historical books, both of the Old and New Testaments, retain the peculiar characteristics that I have noticed; the simplicity and brevity of the narrative—the practice of repeating all discourses in the identical words spoken, and the constant use of figurative, symbolical and allegorical language. But of the rules of composition prescribed by the Grecian schools, the utilities of Aristotle, or the congruities of figures taught by the Greek philologists, not a feature is to be seen. The Psalms are a collection of songs; the Song of Solomon is a pastoral poem; the Proverbs are a collection of moral sentences and maxims apparently addressed by Solomon to his son, with the addition of others of the same description; the prophetic books are partly historical and partly poetical—they contain the narrative of visions and revelations of the Deity to the prophets who recorded them.

In the New Testament the four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles are historical—they contain memories of the life of Christ and some of His apostles, and the proceedings of some of His principal apostles, for some years after His decease. The simplicity of the narrative is the same as that of the Old Testament; the style in general indicates an age when reading and writing had become more common and books more multiplied. The epistles of Paul are the productions of a mind educated in the learning of the age, and well versed in the Grecian literature; from his history it appears that he was not only capable of maintaining an argument with the doctors of the Jewish law, but of discussing principles with the Stoic and Epicurean philosophers; his speech at Athens is a specimen of eloquence worthy of an audience in the native country of Demosthenes. The Apocalypse of John resembles in many respects some of the prophetic books of the Old Testament; the figurative, symbolical, and allegorical language of these books shew a range of imagination suitable only to be the record of dreams and visions—their language is in many parts inexplicably obscure. It has been, and is to this day, among the follies and vices of many Christian sects to attempt

explanations adapted to sectarian purposes and opinions. The style of none of the books, either of the Old or New Testament, affords a general model for imitation to a writer of the present age; the principle and rules for composition derived from Greek and Roman schools, and the example of their principal writers, have been so generally adopted in modern literature, that the Scriptures—differing so essentially from them—could not be imitated without great affectation: but for pathos of narrative; for the selection of incidents that go directly to the heart; for the picturesque of character and manner; the selection of circumstances that mark the individuality of persons; for copiousness, grandeur, and sublimity of imagery; for unanswerable cogency and closeness of reasoning, and for irresistible force of persuasion, no book in the world deserves to be so unceasingly studied, and so profoundly meditated upon as the Bible.

I shall conclude here the series of letters, which I proposed about two years ago to write you for the purpose of exhorting you to search the Scriptures, and of pointing out to your consideration the general points of application; with a view to which, I thought this study might be made profitable to the improvement and usefulness of your future life. There are many other and particular points to which I may hereafter occasionally invite your attention. I am sensible how feeble and superficial what I have written has been, and every letter has convinced me more and more of my own incompetency to the adequate performance of the task I had assumed; but my great object was to show you the importance of devoting your own faculties to this pursuit; to read the Bible is of itself a laudable occupation, and can scarcely fail of being a useful employment of time; but the habit of reflecting upon what you have read is equally essential as that of reading itself, to give it all the efficacy of which it is susceptible. I therefore recommend to you to set apart a small portion of every day to read one or more chapters of the Bible, and always read it with reference to some particular train of observation or reflection.—In these letters I have suggested to you four general ones. Considering the Scriptures as divine revelations; as historical records; as a system of morals; and as literary compositions. There are many other points of view in which they may be subjects of useful investigation.

As an expedient for fixing your attention, make it also a practice for some time to minute down in writing your reflections upon what you read from day to day; you may at first find this irksome, and your reflections scanty and unimportant, but they will soon become both easy and copious. Be careful of all not to let your reading make you a pedant or a bigot; let it never puff you up with pride, or a conceited opinion of your own knowledge, nor make you intolerant of the opinions which others draw from the same source, however different from your own.—And may the merciful Creator, who gave the Scriptures for instruction, bless your study of them and make them to you "fruitful of good works."

From your affectionate father,
JOHN QUINCY ADAMS.

WHENCE COMES THE CURSE?

But there is another complaint involved in a vague impression that God has cursed the earth, your field of labour. Let us investigate this charge a moment. My dear sir, your Maker bids you put your finger upon that curse, and establish its paternity. For the long gloomy annals of humanity furnished a world of irresistible evidence, that man possesses an infinite capacity to curse himself with every form of sin, misery, and degradation. On the strength of this evidence, I dare arraign him before you and the world, for having cursed the earth, too, with all the burning leprosy that has blotched its face from creation down, and then charged that curse upon his Maker. And I trust a short examination will make him plead guilty of this aggravated insolence. First, let us hear what He has to say for himself. The Creator asks you, what more He could have done for your physical comfort than He has done, is doing and has promised to do, for that object. He invites you to analyse the solar system and the human system, and discover any defect in His physical laws; any instance where a new principle might be introduced, which would enhance the perfection of either of those systems. Examine the machinery of the globe. See if, were it centered at any other point, more of its surface would enjoy a more vertical sun. See if you could suggest an amendment to the laws of its motions, which would give a better variety of seasons to the whole human family, and vivify the earth with more genial dispensations of light and shade, cold and heat. Call in the anatomist, to help you; exam-

ine your own physical system, and if you can show, by demonstration, that a new sense or a new disposition of your present organs of sense, would render your physical enjoyments more varied and exquisite, then the absence of that provision shall be admitted as evidence to establish the charge you have preferred against your Maker. But you shall not be confined to testimony so difficult of acquisition. If you can show that a single grain of wheat sown by man, ever brought forth a thistle or a thorn, then I will give up the argument. To be sure the quantity of grain sufficient to satisfy the labourer for a single meal, contains alcohol enough to make him beastly drunk; but if ever a labourer was intoxicated by that grain when made into bread, then I will own that God has directly and unconditionally cursed the earth. But he said that it should bring forth thorns and thistles to man. Glorious truth! In that declaration were embraced the high reward of industry and the Cain-mark curse of indolence. It anno'ced a provision of infinite grace and wisdom, to make the pleasures of sense and life the reward of activity and labour. Thorns and thistles have ever grown in rank profusion, but always upon the graves of labour, never, never beneath her feet. They have been, and ever will be, the spontaneous harvest of indolence, the evidence of inaction and the absence of labour. Two centuries ago, they spread in bristling ranks and tangled thickets over the whole wide wilderness of America; and now this world of Eden fertility is a perennial trophy of labour, which has made, or will make, that wilderness blossom as the rose.—'Tis true, thorns and thistles have not been confined to the sombre solitudes of barbarism; they have grown rankest over all the blood-seething fields of battle. They are the only crop which any soil enriched by human blood will yield. They spring up where the soldier treads, and thrive beneath the sword and bayonet; but they wither at the labourer's breath, and die beneath the mattock and the spade. On every scene of desolation by human violence, they have raised their rough crests to testify that man has cursed the ground as well as himself. Select the choicest gardens of Europe that have been reduced to haggard sterility, and hold an inquest over the incumbent curse. See if it is because the heavens over that once favored region have become brass, and withheld the light, heat, rain and dew, that thorns and briars have supplanted the rose. See if you can trace back this curse, or any other that rests upon humanity, to any other source than the heart of man. "Whence come wars and fightings?" was a question asked and answered eighteen hundred years ago. If that inspired answer is not satisfactory, whence come they? let us ask again—Are they the constitutional instincts of human nature, and rendered inevitable by the physical laws of humanity? Were the hostile hosts that met at Marathon and Waterloo drawn into deadly collision by gravitation? Were the fourteen millions of human beings that have perished in war, jostled into that bloody fate by the revolutions of the globe? No! the earth that drank their blood, appeals to God that man has cursed every thing he touched; cursed the land and sea; cursed the iron, gold and silver; cursed his own labour, and all the productions of the soil; cursed his own heart, his affections and appetites. He was made upright, but he has found out many inventions indeed. Sin, misery, slavery, war, want, and indolence, are all his inventions; and they have cost him labour too. Watch him while inventing a new curse. See how much ingenuity he displays in converting some nutritious productions into a liquid poison for himself and his neighbor? For years he has been scheming to gratify the new passions that he has kindled in his bosom. His plans have come to an issue; and now his bark is crossing to the African shore, laden with articles that will pander to the appetites of the slave-trappers of that unhappy continent. He plies the sable aborigines with intoxicating liquors, till their dark natures burn with passions foreign to the brutes. He exchanges the deadly drug and varied instruments of death for the bone of their bone, and flesh of their flesh.—He fills his empty manacles with human limbs and souls. See him lead out that broken-hearted band to the cane-field of St. Domingo. What a wild, vacant look of despair is fixed in their tearless eyes, as they bow to their bondage? Watch their strokes while the iron is corroding in their hearts.—No hope of reward strings a nerve; the blistering drops that fall from their sable cheeks, are like drops of blood; they earn no bread; they purchase no prospect of redemption.—See how that proud man has cursed labor.—E. Burritt.

Published monthly by the Committee of
THE MONTREAL UNITARIAN SOCIETY.

Joseph W. Harrison, Printer.