

Why We Should Study the Bible.

BY REV. H. F. WARING.

As we appreciate the inspiration of the Bible we appreciate the importance of Bible study. The comparative study of religious literatures in their use as well as in their origin, by showing us the superior inspiration of the Bible in literature and life, strengthens the belief that the Bible was given by inspiration.

How great is inspiration in our literature especially the best. Its influence upon Milton was such that the presentation of his religious views have been so identified with the Bible that sometimes where they differ from or supplement it they are viewed as if taken from the Bible itself. To intelligently read Shakespeare and Tennyson implies a knowledge of the Bible that we learn many college students today do not possess. The pages of Macaulay and of Addison are brightened by it, and the eloquence of Gladstone, Webster, Burke, and Bright are heightened by it. Dickens inspired by Walter Savage Landor that he got the story that Landor praised. In the New Testament to be sure that he got more than his style from the Bible his writings frequently show. Its influence upon Thackeray was a great one. To Scott it was the Book. Through the whole range of English literature, which it has practically made, its influence is reflected not only in definite references but also in the making and the moulding of the greatest thoughts, and as with English literature so with those of other tongues.

Much might be written of its influence upon art also, but more important than its inspiration in art or literature is its inspiration in lives. The man who has fed upon its revealed doctrines Spurgeon listens to a "giant refreshed with new wine." "I am much interested in the people who made the Bible," said Dr. Parkhurst, "but I am more interested in the people whom the Bible makes, for they show me the fibre and genius of Scripture as no mental studiousness or verbal exegesis can do." What is the origin of the Bible's fibre and genius as thus revealed? Dr. R. W. Dale makes answer. "In every heart that is won from the love of sin to the love of God," etc. "by the writings of psalmists, prophets and apostles, I find evidence that holy men of old spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." Putting in a sentence the gist of these strong utterances we would say that a great (if not the great) argument for the Bible as inspired literature is the results—inspired lives.

Think of the influence upon Jesus of whatever he had of it and of its influence since through him. How it fits "into every fold and crevice of the human heart." Because of this how its circulation has increased and in so many different languages scores of which have been reduced to writing for the one great purpose that the peoples using them might also use the Bible. The more impressive as coming from a liberal thinker are the eloquent words of Theodore Parker. "This collection of books has taken such a hold on the world as has no other. The literature of Greece which goes up like incense from the land of temples and heroic deeds has not had the influence of this book. It goes equally to the cottage of the plain man and the palace of the king. It is woven into the literature of the scholar and colors the talk of the street." Why? How great its power in both obtaining and retaining liberty! "The best of all allies that you can procure for us," said Garibaldi "is the Bible; that will bring us the reality of freedom." To another great soldier, General Grant, it was "the sheet anchor of our liberties." Why?

How it has made the prison walls to resound with praise to God and even the fiery tongues of martyrs to tell of God's love and to sing with the psalmist the words quoted by the dying philosopher. "Thy God and thy staff they comfort me." How through it our fathers and mothers have been strengthened for their work, cheered in their sorrows, filled with unattainable peace, lifted at times to the ecstatic summits of the more taunts of heavenly joy, given grace in passing through the valley of the shadow of death and at last how they followed their heads upon its pinnacles and fell asleep in God. Why? As Handel in his production of the Messiah has obtained from the study of the Scriptures said of himself. "I do think I did see all heaven before me and the great God himself," so men throughout the ages through the study of the Bible that they might give to the world the inspiring music of a Christian life have beheld heavenly things and have felt the presence of God. Why? Why? I can but answer that I believe it was because the Bible contains revelations of eternal truths—revelations thrilling with the very breath of God, that it is inspired.

Believing that the best defence of the Bible is the Bible itself, that it might not only defend itself but win victories for righteousness, truth and God, my prayer is for a better knowledge of it, and to this end a truer interpretation of it, by all. To those who do not believe with us, in the special inspiration of the Bible or who may be somewhat uncertain concerning it we would say, we confidently submit the Bible, as we would submit any other literature, to your most critical examination. We simply ask that you be honest with it and with yourselves. Do not confound any particular theory of inspiration with the fact of inspiration. While we do not ask you to minimize the difficulties of the Bible we have a right to ask that you do not magnify them and, because though them you think you

can puncture an inflated theory of inspiration, to think that therefore the Bible is not inspired at all and to feel that it has no further claim upon your attention. We ask that you approach it not as a special pleader either for or against it, but simply to find out just what it is.

We are not only willing but are very anxious for you to compare it with other religious literatures, keeping in mind however that the different literatures in their different parts should be compared in the light of their different times, etc. Believing that the worst infidelity is fear for the truth, we ask simply that our scriptures be permitted to enter where there is a fair field, and no favor, for we ourselves want them only as they win by their own inherent worth. We are not only willing but very anxious for a comparison between the effects of the Bible and those of other literatures; only asking that it be the result not of a narrow study of a few loose living Christians so-called, or of the influence of only the difficulties in the Bible, but a broad study including those of course but very much more. Very important is the history of the making of the Bible, very important also the making of history by the Bible. Study both, trying especially to get the Bible's picture or pictures of Jesus Christ and its influence through Him. Then after you have with unbiased mind studied its contents and especially what it says of Him, and their influence upon the world especially through Him, we ask that you give an honest expression of your thought of the Bible and of Him; and that you strive to live according to the best they present to you. We think you will agree with us that the Bible belongs to the inspired movement of which Christianity is the religion of Jesus Christ, the "bright consummate flower"; that it is an inspiring supporter of this now, unnational, world-wide movement; and that its authority is the authority of truth revealed especially in and through Jesus Christ.

A word to those believing in the inspiration of the Bible. Let us not be afraid of investigation and comparison. Let us confidently invite them, insisting, however, that they be honest and intelligent. Let us not be afraid of comparative religion. Would it not be pathetic and pitiful for us to be filled with such solicitude for the welfare of that which we believe is inspired of God that we would seek in our littleness to defend it by an unscientific and unhistorical method of study that would not permit it to be honestly compared with other religious literatures. Remember the story of the mayor who in his solicitude for the welfare of a well armed regiment offered it the protection of four of his policemen in order that it might not on its way to the next town be overpowered by a few wayside robbers. Let us get the thought of a leading Hindu who said: "If I were a missionary I would not argue; I would give the people the New Testament and say, read that."

Keeping in mind the progressiveness of its revelation we have no doubt that the religion of the Bible is preeminently fitted to be the world religion. A significant feature of the so-called "yellow peril" in the Far East is that Buddhism (which is comparatively speaking so strong in Japan) is seeking to impress upon the Orientals that what Christianity is for the West Buddhism is for the East. Buddhist literature is being more widely circulated. Can we wish for anything better than that it be honestly compared with the Bible, and that its practically atheistic pessimism in the presence of the evil of conscious existence be compared with the Christian's optimistic belief in the Fatherhood of God, the Brotherhood of man and Eternal Life.

Let us not be afraid of Higher Criticism. Let us understand what it is. Condemnation of all higher criticism he speaks an ignorance of what it is. A bright young man who had been listening to some indiscriminate tirades against it was asked: "What is Higher Criticism?" I am not sure about the adjective but his description of it was that it was some kind of an unclean or "vicious" beast." While Textual (Lower) Criticism aims to give us the original words as nearly as possible, Higher Criticism aims to give their authorship, dates, etc. Its work is necessarily of such a nature that it would be foolish to look for unanimity even among critics of practically the same theological views. While undoubtedly a number of them have been prejudiced (for instance against all that was miraculous) a number have come to conclusions without sufficient evidence; yet so many conscientious Christian specialists are now engaged in this historical and literary study that their work is more and more recognized as a means of getting a truer appreciation of the Book of Books.

As one who foolishly doubtless (but sorrowfully) lost his mother's Bible, to receive it again however and from the hands of those specialists and to be a richer treasury than before, let me say the critic most to be feared is not the so-called Higher Critic but the ordinary critic of the Bible as translated into our lives. Let not the triteness of the expression that Christians are the world's Bibles rob us of the appreciation of its truth. May the interpolations of the flesh be more and more eliminated, and as a sure token of the Holy Spirit's work may the world read in the language of our lives and in an increasingly felicitous translation: "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control," etc. H. F. WARING.

Halifax, N. S.

Some Criticisms of the Article by the Rev. H. F. Waring, M. A., which Appeared in last week's Messenger and Visitor.

BY E. M. SAUNDERS, D. D.

The Rev. Mr. Waring preached three sermons in the First Church, Halifax, on the inspiration of the Bible, subsequently gave the substance of them in his convention sermon, lectured on the same theme at another place, and then discussed the subject at length in his Bible class. Now we find his definition of the inspiration of the Bible given to the denomination through the MESSENGER AND VISITOR.

To forestall any incorrect impression, I wish to say that in my criticism of Brother Waring's views, it must not be inferred that our relations are strained. Quite otherwise. They are cordial. Brother Waring is a minister of exceptional gifts, of excellent Christian spirit, and wholly devoted to his work. Knowing that I differed from him on the subject of the inspiration of the Bible, he has repeatedly expressed the wish that I would criticise his views publicly, as I am now about to do.

At the conclusion of the discussion of the general subject in the Bible class, according to his promise, he gave the following reply to the question—one of the 25—"What is the inspiration of the Bible?"

"By the inspiration of the Bible, we mean that divine influencing of the Hebrews, Jews and early Christians, by virtue of which there was produced a literature, in revealing their religious conceptions, especially in and through Jesus Christ, finds when viewed in the light of their times, a higher response within us, and produces a greater effect upon us and the world, than does any other literature.

This, as will be observed, was not accompanied by any qualification. It was an unqualified reply to an unqualified question. It was taken as Brother Waring's definition of inspiration after his full discussion of the subject in public. I want, in the first place, to show the striking resemblance between this definition and the views of a number of living ministers, as given below:

The Rev. Paul P. Frothingham, Unitarian minister, Boston, says:—

"The Bible differs from other Scriptures only to the degree to which it has proved itself helpful. Inspiration is the spirit or mind of man attaining to the thought of God and, in this sense, all the great poets and writers of the ages have been inspired."

The Rev. Thomas R. Slicer, another Unitarian minister, says:—

"What is the test for these books of Hebrew religion? All the documents are anonymous. . . . That which finds me, that which inspires me, is inspired for me. . . . That is inspired which inspires. . . . Religion is no longer supported upon two great pillars, miracles and prophecy."

Rev. James Freeman Clarke, D. D., a very distinguished Unitarian minister has said as follows:—

"We do not say the writers of the New Testament were infallible. . . . We may assert that the writers of the New Testament have been where we have not been. We may say that they were placed by an inward influence on a higher plain of insight, so as to see spiritual facts and laws which we do not see. . . . What others have thought they have seen; what others report as opinions, they report as facts. . . . The height and depth of their insight indicates a peculiar inspiration."

Of the New Testament writers Dr. Clarke says:—"The living harmony of their opinions indicates a peculiar inspiration. . . . The New Testament writers nowhere claim to be infallibly inspired to write. . . . We look at the facts, at the traits in the New Testament writings which differentiate them from other books, and satisfy ourselves that the writers possessed some peculiar and special inspiration. . . . We now ask can any better view of inspiration be found? and how will it bear on the authority of the Scriptures, the rights of reason, and the teachings of the church? . . . We see by the Scriptures themselves, that this was the one and only kind of inspiration and this inspiration all Christians had. It was common to all. . . . The writers were inspired by a spirit which all true Christians have to-day."

The Rev. William W. Fenn, another Unitarian preacher and writer, says:—

"Biblical criticism arose to show us that the Bible is not infallible; and that the thought of Israel had developed in accordance with universal laws; and comparative religion [comparing the Bible with other religious literatures] made it evident that other nations beside Israel had been divinely taught."

The Rev. Charles Gordon Ames, Unitarian minister of Boston, formerly a Free Baptist minister, says:—

"The book lies wide open; and a careful scrutiny of its contents has made it impossible to regard it as infallible. . . . They are unwise friends of the Bible who speak of it as containing the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth."

The Rev. C. W. Wendte, still another Unitarian minister makes this statement:—

"We accept Christianity as altogether the highest and best revelation of religion that the world has ever known."