

# THE HOME MISSION JOURNAL.

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## The Home Mission Journal.

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### A Study of Human Nature.

The story of Peter's denial comes like a shock in the development of the New Testament narrative. We have not been prepared for it. Peter's loyalty has been of the outspoken, aggressive type, and our Lord Himself had characterized him as "a man of rock." But swiftly upon his boldest protestations of friendship, and in strict accord with the insight of Jesus, Peter thrice denies that he "knew the man."

The story is a mirror in which is reflected some of the tragic features of human nature. Dr. van Dyke has lately written: "The Bridge-Builders in Rudyard Kipling's story would have been fools if they had tried to accomplish their work by ignoring the steady downward thrust of gravitation, or shutting their eyes to the destructive rage of the Ganges-flood. No less foolish is the man who tries to build a life, or a theory of a life, in forgetfulness of the steady downward thrust of human nature, or in denial of the reality and universality of the evil that is in the world." This tremendous and persistently acting force of evil is not obliterated from the lives of the best men. Even when it is counteracted and overcome, it is always present, and if it were not counteracted and overcome it would drag down the noblest life to the meanest level. We ought not to be surprised at the occasional dominance of evil in the lives of good men. The Bible itself contains the record of but one perfect character, and He was more than man.

This fact, upon which we are dwelling, may be so stated as to be an excuse or defence of the sins of good men. But that is a perversion of the truth. Good men fall into sin, but they do not remain there. Other forces are at work in their souls than the steady downward thrust of an evil gravitation. They reveal the inherent soundness of their moral natures by their resistance and conquest of evil in their own hearts. If we look at the Bible broadly we shall see that it is the account of redemptive forces brought to bear upon human life, counteracting and overcoming the evil tendency, and the proof that a man is within this redemptive system, that is, a good man, and in the process of becoming a better man, is not found in the fact that he has never fallen, but that he rises, and manifests increasing success in maintaining himself. No one saw these two forces and their workings with greater clearness than the Apostle Paul. We do not know their precise experience that so deeply impressed their existence and workings upon his mind. But his description of the operation of "the law of the flesh" and "the law of the spirit" is profoundly verified in the experience of those who have had the deepest acquaintance with human life.

The difference between such a man as Peter and Judas is indicated by their conduct after the temptation has spent its force and they find themselves fallen. In Judas there is no resilient force that carries his soul by a mighty rebound away from his degradation. We feel somehow that he is outside the circle of counteractive and redemptive influences. He has never responded to them in such a way that they have any real hold over him. He is like a planet that has not only been diverted from its course by some alien attraction, but has been swept beyond the sway of normal influences, and cannot be brought back to its orbit. Peter, on the other hand, has swerved from his course, but the dominant influence in his life at once reasserts itself.

It is from such a point of view that we see clearly the vast significance to a soul that has been really and vitally brought within the circle of the redemptive influences of the gospel. In our hours of quietness we little understand what those forces mean to us. Their strength is hidden, but when the hour of stress and temptation comes, whether it means our final overthrow or not, principally depends upon whether or not the forces which Christ represents have found anchorage in our hearts, to hold us and keep us.

### The Bible as Literature and Much More.

ROBERT STUART MACARTHUR.

#### I

#### The Divine Revelation of the Bible.

It is confidently affirmed in many quarters that the church is losing its hold upon large classes in the community, that the Bible has ceased to command the reverence and even the respect of the people, and that religion itself is no longer the potent factor which once it was in human thought and life. It is doubtless true, in the case of many who make these assertions, that the wish is father to the thought; and it is also true that similar assertions often have been made which were proved untrue by subsequent events. It must be admitted, however, that the Sabbath is no longer regarded with the sanctity which characterized it in former generations. The early part of the day is well nigh smothered by the blanket-sheet newspaper; later portions of the day are rolled in the dust by the bicycle, and many professedly Christian people join with the acknowledged people of the world in spending what remains of the day in social festivities. The Continental Sunday has made grievous inroads on the American Sabbath; the holy day has largely become simply a holiday.

It is not difficult to account for the indifference and irreverence which characterize Sunday and its services in recent times. For this deplorable result the unwise, and really unscholarly, destructive criticism of the Bible is largely responsible. In former times the enemies of divine revelation were called infidels; now they are called churchmen of various creeds. Formerly they stood outside the temple of truth which they wished to destroy; now they stand in its holy places, wearing its honors and titles, while they are undermining its foundations. The time has come for some metropolitan pulpit to speak clearly and strongly, loyally and lovingly in affirmation of the faith and in defence of the old Bible. It is believed that in all our churches there are many men and women who are utterly weary of the indefiniteness of much of the pulpit teaching of the last few years. The pulpit often has spoken hesitantly, vaguely and apologetically; the time has come for some pulpit to speak strongly, affirmatively and authoritatively. With the hope of contributing somewhat to this method of pulpit instruction, a series of Sunday evening discourses is now contemplated. Its general title is: "The Bible as Literature and Much More;" and the special title of this discourse is, "The Divine Revelation of the Bible."

Revelation is the act or process of revealing or disclosing what before was unknown. The word itself is profoundly suggestive. It comes from the Latin *revelo*, which is made up of *re*, back, and *velum*, a veil. In revelation God draws back the veil which concealed Him from men. Our deepest needs cry out for light from God. Except help come from God, other than that which we derive from the light of nature, we shall sink into moral inanition. We joyously recognize the fact that Nature is a revelation so far as it goes. This truth is beautifully illustrated in the nineteenth psalm. The first six verses of that psalm give us a statement of natural religion; beginning at the seventh verse and going to the end of the thirteenth, we have an illustration of the character and effect of revealed religion; and in

the last verse of the psalm, we have an expression of experimental religion. We thus have creation, revelation and regeneration in the psalm. There is no contradiction whatever between these three forms of communicating the mind of God. Nature is an unwritten Bible, as the Scriptures are a written Bible. Young, in his "Night Thoughts," has well said of nature,

"'Tis e'er Scripture, writ by God's own hand."

Scripture authentic; uncorrupt by man."

And Sir Thomas Browne, as quoted by Dr. George Dana Broadman in his pamphlet, "The Two Bibles" has expressed quaintly and forcibly a similar thought when he says: "There are two books from which I collect my divinity: besides that written one of God, another of his servant Nature—that universal and public manuscript that lies expanded unto the eyes of all." We err when we unduly depreciate the light of nature. We have sometimes supposed that we honored the God of the Word by imperfectly appreciating the God of the world. It is possible for us in this way to imagine that we are specially religious toward God's written Bible, when we are simply irreverent toward God's unwritten Bible.

But there are great questions which the light of nature can never answer; and these questions are to us of the utmost importance. If they be not answered, our moral nature is dwarfed, shrivelled, truncated; and even our intellectual powers are restrained and warped. How can men be just with God? Is there forgiveness for sin? Is there power anywhere to enable us to triumph over evil? Is there a God in the universe? If so, is He compassionate, forgiving, loving, or the reverse? Natural religion cannot fully answer these profound questions. Even in the case of the questions which it does answer, we require fuller confirmation than Nature herself can give. Greece in all the glory of her art and song, was helpless at heart to overcome the moral evil which was destroying her life. Rome, in her varied majesty and martial splendor, was unable to stem the awful tide of corruption which swept over all classes alike. The highest knowledge possible apart from a divine revelation is painfully imperfect, if it be not grossly corrupt. Every heathen altar in ancient days and in modern times tells of man's need of a divine revelation. There is nothing at once more pathetic and inspiring than the Apostle Paul's reference, in his sermon on Mars' Hill, to the altar dedicated "to the unknown god." The Greeks had lords many, but they did not satisfy the aspirations of their cultured minds and the longings of their aching hearts. In Japan to day may be seen an idolatry as gross, superstitious, and repulsive as that among the nations which reputedly are far below the Japanese in intelligence and even in morality. Every heathen form of worship is a testimony at once to man's need of divine help, to his extreme moral depravity, and to the possibility of his rendering worship to the true God. There is evermore in the heart of man a longing after God, perverted though it often becomes. Even among degraded peoples there are remnants of the nobility of their nature and of their varied aspirations after God. God's image, though defaced, is not effaced. Eut the most advanced heathen nations, in their idolatrous practices, confess their ignorance regarding the profoundest questions of time and eternity.

#### REVELATION IS TO BE EXPECTED.

May we expect help, light and life from God? Has God given us this deep longing after Himself, and will He fail to reveal Himself? Will He mock us by continued disappointment? Are our nobler natures false to themselves and to Himself? Are not our aspirations God's inspirations? May we expect God to draw aside the veil and reveal Himself as a loving Father to His wandering and often sorrowful children? From what we know of Him by nature, may we not expect that He will meet the deep needs of our intellectual and moral natures by their appropriate supply? We rejoice in the fact that God has made Himself partially