

What the Bible Means to Me

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that I am glad to have a clean page so as to get an open field for thought. I still have a sort of dislike to reading my Bible in railway trains, and especially when one is waiting for meals to be served in public places, where one has no one to speak to and nothing else to fill his mind, though I prefer the Bible then as a thought suggester to any daily paper I ever saw.

The reason that one doesn't like to produce one's Bible in these odd minutes is because he hates to be thought to be posing as "unco' guid." Some day I shall hope to have my pocket Bible bound like my Oxford book of verse in a cover that is not distinctively religious, and in a form that is not conventional; in fact, such an edition as I should choose for any other of my favorite companion books. The "Twentieth Century Bible" or "Modern Reader's Bible" on India paper and in a yellow cover would be more to my mind. I presume the reason that the same passages start new trains of thought on returning to them is because it is a new man they are talking to. Anyhow, wonderful as it sounds, it certainly is true.

Wonderful Wisdom

Nothing strikes me, however, as so wonderful about the Bible as its wisdom. Never book spoke like this book. It gives me thoughts that never entered my head otherwise, and never on any occasion have I regretted its conversation afterwards. I always find myself astonished that a lot of people of such ordinary rank in life gave birth to it. Personally I have never had time to devote to studying the text in Greek or Latin or Hebrew, nor do I read Sanskrit or cuneiform languages or inscriptions on monoliths. There never seems any need for me to do so. If all the scholars of past and present years haven't yet arrived at what the original meant sufficiently to put it into the vulgar English tongue, it would be simply presumption on my part to endeavor to help them. I found it quite enough to translate the old English of two and a half centuries ago into the twentieth century vernacular, till these new versions came to my aid. I never have had any bias towards devoting time to the study of musty manuscripts, as some men have.

I do not read my Bible for the English of it. All I care about is understanding it. I have lost all interest at times in trying to read it, for I found so many places where the King James translation conveyed no meaning to me. Even if the English were verbally or otherwise inspired, what use was that if I didn't understand it? It isn't a kind of charm, the mere recital of which wards off evil nor can it be conferring a favor upon God to read and listen to what He says, nor does it leave Him under an obligation. It does bring me nearer to Him when I understand it, for it is a storehouse of rich treasures of wisdom into which I may delve. I do that, however, asking Him to give me just what He sees I need each time I go to it, and I do not look on it as an enlarged armory into which I may go to get some fresh weapon to score my enemy and perpetuate strife.

Get What You Want

It seems to me you get out of it pretty well what you are in search of, and I've met men who have come from it bristling like hedgehogs or sea urchins, so as to be mighty undesirable companions. I think if I couldn't come away from reading my Bible more peaceful and more forgiving and more contented with the world, I wouldn't worry it as often as I do now, anyhow.

The reason the average man doesn't read his Bible is because he doesn't want to. It isn't from principle or conviction he neglects it. Put it in a form in which it interests him; add, if you like, the discipline of becoming familiar with it as a boy, and so acquiring a taste for it; be sure he has a real understanding of its exquisite, simple stories, and he won't fail to return to it sometime.

As for compelling boys to promise to read so much of it every day, I have no use for that. That is the way I was induced to take cod liver oil, but never learned to like it. Moreover, it was a horrible temptation to say you had taken

it, when perhaps you had only taken it to the fire or the sink. I know there was a tendency to make boys either unnatural or unvarnished by that method. Yet I also know the Bible can be made interesting, whether to one ten years old or twenty.

To me the book is a gospel, or good news, and only as such do I value it. When one thinks of the millions who spend hours a week reading newspapers, the majority of which are crowded with useless, harmful or incorrect items, it seems not so "old-maidish" as some might consider it to read one's Bible more, and save sluicing one's cerebral gray matter with a stream that is not calculated to evolve its capacity for right thinking or steady up its equilibrium.

Being always fond of puzzles and problem solving, I can take some short portion of the Bible and enjoy thinking over its meaning for me at odd moments of the day. If I find a solution, I take good care to write it in my copy, and later to hand the idea on to some one I think it will help. I never yet had a man think this was talking cant, and they are generally grateful for the thought.

Moody's Teachings

I first learned to study my Bible from D. L. Moody's writings. He wrote a tract called "How to Study the Bible," and any one just beginning to look for help to the old chart of life could do much worse than commence with this little help from that eminently practical, human Christian man. One can strike in on the first page, without trouble or expense. A word concordance and an English dictionary are the next most useful things in my opinion. Of all the commentaries none to my mind approaches Matthew Henry's. I fully indorse Charles Spurgeon's remark, that any Bible student who has not got that book should sell his coat and buy it. I think to study the Bible for addresses, and so forth, is a fatal mistake. Study it for yourself as a guide to avoid shoals and rocks, as a key to open the door to the real pathway of life. A friend of mine, who went to Uganda as a missionary, told me for this reason he found the silent years while he was learning the language just invaluable. As for public reading of the Bible, we have an informal way at our fishermen's services of commenting on the text as we read it, having, of course, sought for wisdom to understand it ourselves beforehand. I should hate to get up and read in public a message from God that I didn't understand or hadn't first tried to understand. How could I make any one else do so otherwise? Take, for instance, Isaiah, chapter nine, and read that aloud in the authorized version without comment. To me it is a stultifying proceeding, as it conveys no meaning. If one were ordered to monotone or read the couplet about the "slithy toves" from "Alice in Wonderland," which is also meaningless as it stands, one would blankly refuse.

Value of Explanation

Christ loved to explain it, Philip did the same, and he was a wonderfully successful Christian. Paul used to explain the Scriptures. The explanation seemed especially to be the Christian disciples' specialty. They had the Scriptures before, but the men on the road to Emmaus, the eunuch in the chariot, the Jews in Asia, simply needed the explanation. The only drawback to the Scripture having been written so long ago is that it is constantly necessary to convert it into the vernacular. What is this but trying to make "every man to hear God's word speak in his own language." Surely this is still a gift of the Holy Spirit to-day, whether we seek to hear God's voice in it ourselves, or make it audible to others. There is more pathos perhaps than we are apt to think at first in the old yarn about the woman who, after hearing the Bible read, could only remember the "blessed word Mesopotamia."

It is always a great privilege to me to be asked to "read the Scripture" in public, and even portions that mean little to me I have known to be a great source of joy to hearers whose needs I did not know. The hush that marks an intelligent reading, the sitting up of the audience, the silence in which the proverbial pin could be heard to drop, shows incontrovertibly how the Bible will still hold an audience when it gets fair treatment.

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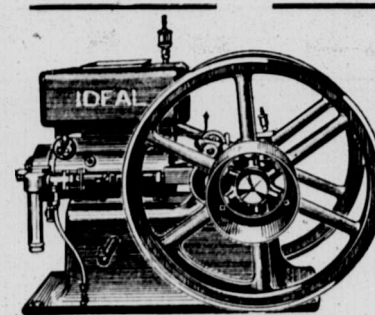
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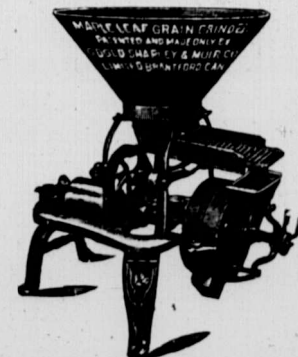
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