

Sabbath School Literature.

It is hardly conceivable that many persons could be found to echo the sentiments of P. W. in his recent article on Sabbath School Literature, but his remarks form a text for reply too tempting to resist.

The substance of his advice may be given in a few words. Avoid fiction; choose books of fact; expose the sulphurous origin of works of imagination; picture the delights of the standard religious authors. Now when P. W.'s favorite authors are brought to the test of his favorite axioms, it will be seen that logic is something which no one can get away from, and that some facts are quite impossible in the light of other hard facts.

According to P. W., works of imagination are "lies." It follows, naturally, that the lying element accompanies imagination wherever it goes. To begin with, then, the Bible must be considerably condensed before it is fit either for youthful or adult readers. The Psalms of David, the drama of Job, the books of the prophets, the parables of Christ, and the book of Revelation, contain enough poetical fancies ("fascinating lies") to "enslave" one's mind for life. What could David, for instance, have been thinking about when he said, "The mountains skipped like rams, and the little hills like lambs?" The smallest child in the infant class knows that mountains and hills don't skip. Such a representation has not even the merit of being true to nature. And there are hundreds just as untrue. The book of Ruth and the Song of Solomon are, if anything, more pernicious for they are love stories, and are not love stories among the bad books that lead youths to ruin?

But what shall be said of Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, a work of imagination from beginning to end! This must be worse even than a lie here and there, for it is an unbroken series of consecutive "lies," without even a peg of a fact to stand upon. The Holy War belongs in the same category, and woe to the child who reads and takes it for fact. (It is a relief to note that P. W.'s taste, in some respects, is superior to his logic.) Boys and girls should be taught that such fabrications emanate from the bottomless pit.

What a stale old world this would be if P. W.'s theories governed it! There would be no color in sky or earth, no sparkle on the sea, no perfumed flowers, and no music anywhere, not so much as the note of a grasshopper. These things are neither solid nor useful. They simply "please the fancy and tickle the imagination," and were probably created in order to develop the special virtue of resisting their seductive charms. Why, our very ideas of heaven depend upon such images as are furnished by these unstable materials! It is high time, indeed, that the young should be taught the "perniciousness of imagination."

The other old standard books mentioned are certainly safe reading, if a pleasing style is unsafe. They would undoubtedly edify and establish a certain type of Christian character, but it is not the type which is needed at this end of the century. One cannot wonder at a book-loving child of our grandmothers' time for taking to them when there was nothing else in the house to read; but if a boy of this decade should be found in a corner devouring Saint's Rest or Flavel's Method of Grace the best thing to do would be to look at his tongue and send for the doctor.

As for Havergal, Spurgeon, Meyer, Drummond, Moody and Talmage, they are capable of giving great delight to certain types of mature minds, but if they are placed on shelves for the choice and use of the intermediate department in Sunday School, they will stay there till they grow yellow. If the librarian deals them out willy-nilly they will be exchanged for religious novels that have been "read twice already," or else taken home and flung down in disgust. If father or mother wants them read aloud there will be a boy waiting round the corner on important business, or else for once in its life the woodbox will be in desperate need of filling. In short, the youths of this age are not to be forced into liking what they don't like, and why in the name of reason should they be? Most Sunday School directors are conscious of this little peculiarity of human nature. They effect a compromise by stuffing their shelves with religious novels and other stories that have enough love thrown in to make the bait tempting, and not enough good English and other little trifles necessary to the making of literature. These form the bulk of the reading matter provided by the average Sunday School. A long course of them will surely end in blunting the perceptions and making them unsusceptible to the higher and finer delights of true literature.

What, then, is to be done? It is felt, and rightly, that no book should be put into the hands of children which is at variance with the precepts of religion. But what is religion? Does it consist alone in the reflections and experiences of ripened saints, in attendance on the means of grace and in the spiritual exercises of prayer, praise and exhortation? These are but parts of the

whole. Religion is the assimilation, exercise and propagation of whatever is good and beautiful in the universe, whether it be material, moral or spiritual. "To think on" any subject, whatever, that is "true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report," is as truly an act of religion as to think on one's sins, and vastly more profitable. To be "pure, peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy;" "to visit the sick, feed the hungry and comfort those in trouble," is religion itself, according to the Bible, and more important than long prayers. Why then are not all books, whether founded on fact or spun of pure fancy, which represent these virtues in a light that inspires a boy or girl to *think* better, or to *be* better, or to *do* better—why are not these books religious? In this sense there are thousands of books which do but follow the example of the Bible in illustrating and embellishing the highest truths by all the arts and resources of the language. They are being turned out by every reputable publishing house in the country,—wide-awake books of popular science, re-arranged chapters of history, travels, enchanting fairy tale-vivid character sketches, pure, wholesome love stories together with new and attractive editions of the best literature of the past;—and yet in the face of all this P. W. wants to unearth Baxter and Flavel and Harriet Newell and what not other dry-bones, and attempt to make the boys and girls read and love them! As well try to argue that wormwood is nice, and cod liver oil a desirable dainty.

The simple truth is that children, as well as the rest of us, are more than half creatures of imagination. Their craving for fiction is a natural and healthy one. Bread is good, but bread and butter is better, and a little sugar or jam on top hurts no one. So with the facts of history, science and morals; they are just as nourishing and more palatable if well oiled and sweetened by imagination. And the dainty conceits of pure imagination are just as harmless and helpful as a little clear sugar or jam now and then. At any rate, boys and girls who are not born saints or hypocrites, are bound to have them. It they are not supplied with the right sort, they will take the wrong sort on the sly, and tell lies when you ask what they have been doing.

Since these are the facts, why not meet them half way and turn them to advantage? Since much of the evil in the world is due to perverted imaginations, why not begin in the right place to purify the imagination?—not by rooting it out, or choking it out, but by furnishing it with the right kind of stimulus to grow to something sweet and wholesome and beautiful. The means for a revolution or at least an improvement in this direction, are within easy reach; and the careful committees who select the religious novels, weeding out the poor from the indifferent, ought to be capable of distinguishing between the moral and the immoral in the popular and attractive literature of the day. The Bible, with common-sense expositions of the Bible, is sufficient to supply every need for purely spiritual food. For the rest, let us choose such sermons as the birds and the flowers and the stones preach to us,—sermons of sweet and lively songs, gay colors, and rare and exquisite conformations. The moral is always there, but if any one writes it out on a paper tag, the Sunday School children will skip it every time. Let P. W. ask them and see. B. B.

The Mastery Of Life.

BY PROF. SAMUEL C. MITCHELL.

We ought never to shut our eyes to the pleasant features of life—the beauty of nature, the sweetness of human friendships, the warmth of love, and the joy which at times thrills through us. But while we do not wish to forget these, we cannot forget the harsher aspects of our condition. Nature is too often steel-like in her operations and in her attitude toward us. The path which she marks out for our feet is simply by no means a rosy one. At times we seem but atoms with which she delights to sport. It is not alone in her volcanic moods, such as the hurricane and flood, that she appears ruthless. An infinitesimal germ finds lodgment at one point on the Gulf coast, and soon pestilence stalks through many states, carrying everywhere panic, cessation of business, sickness and death. Nature is pleased also to remind us that we live ever in the neighborhood of inevitable death.

There is, moreover, the struggle with the forces of darkness in society and in the world—ignorance to fight, corruption to baffle, crime to detect and punish, while misery in ghastly forms everywhere confront us. Sin is a cardinal fact of our condition, and our energies are put forth to keep back this flood-tide, just as the Hollanders give themselves heroically to holding the ocean in check by their enormous dykes. Nature and the world are, however, not our worst foes. Self is the arch enemy. The body is hard to keep under, while the mind is full

of doubt and the heart unclean. Illusions beset the senses, the intellect, the conscience, so that often our very endeavor to do right miscarries. It is not alone in the awful pauses of existence that we feel the unsatisfactoriness of life. It thrusts itself upon our attention ever and anon, even in our happiest moods. Goethe, who of all men seemed self-sufficient, said in old age to his friend Eckermann: "I have ever been esteemed one of fortune's chief favorites; nor can I complain of the course my life has taken. Yet, truly, there has been nothing but toil and care; and in my seventy-fifth year I may say that I have never had four weeks of genuine pleasure. The stone was ever to be rolled up anew. We may lean for a while on our brothers and friends, be amused by acquaintance, rendered happy by those we love; but in the end man is always driven back upon himself. And it seems as if the divinity had so placed himself in relation to man as not always to respond to his reverence, trust and love; at least in the terrible moment of need. "This is the cry in the soul to which no response comes from the world."

Under such circumstances as these it is a boon to have suggested something that gives to us the mastery of life. Whether we seek for truth, or delve for gold, or drink deep of pleasure, our real object is the same—to wrench victory from the world. The Apostle John tells us what this power is which we need. "This is the victory which overcometh the world even our faith." In this sentence the effect is put for the cause, the result is identified with the means. "Faith wins the victory over the world," is the sense of the passage.

As the sun is the ultimate source of all energy in the physical world, so faith is the source of all moral power exerted by men, either in the progress of the race or in subduing their natures to the will of God. A faithless man is a helpless man. No man has been a constructive force in history unless he has had faith—if not faith in God, at least faith in truth, in mankind, in some cause or in a destiny appointed him. Whatsoever force flows from a man is traceable to his faith. Socrates genuinely believed that the "voice" which forbade him in crisis to do certain things was the immediate guidance of God vouchsafed to him. With this bit in his mouth he walked unflinchingly into death—"the first martyr to intellectual liberty." The regnant purpose of Hannibal was more single and stronger than that of almost any other character in history. The destruction of Rome seemed to him his divinely appointed mission in the world. In descending from the Alps against Italy, he declared that a vision appeared to him in sleep, revealing the awful fate of Rome, and at the same time saying that should he hesitate to wreak vengeance upon the City, the like wrath of the gods would fall upon him. Rome in her centuries of history had but one Hannibal as an antagonist, and to his belief in the heaven-designed character, of the war, we are to ascribe the all but unconquerable power of that enemy. At the battle of Dunbar, as the early morning sun was clearing away the mist that covered the lowlands, Cromwell cried out to his legions: "Let God arise and let his enemies be scattered." In that prophet-like voice there resounded an unshakable faith in the cause for which Oliver was contending, and before the terrible onset of the *Ironclad* Roundheads the Scots were scattered like chaff before the wind. Napoleon's trust in his "star" is only an intimation that he was consciously a Hercules' club in the hands of God to knock to pieces the rotten thrones throughout Europe, as a means of getting ready the encumbered ground for better things.

These instances of blindfolded-faith in profane history will encourage us to enter more fully into the spirit of the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, where the deeds of that long roll of heroes, prophets and martyrs are ascribed to their faith alone. They "endured as seeing him who is invisible." Said one who was not given to boasting: "I can do all things through Christ, who strengtheneth me." With the shield of faith he was able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. A greater than Paul ventured to say: "If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, . . . nothing shall be impossible unto you." By faith we are made more than conquerors through him that loved us.

That phrase "more than conquerors" has fresh light thrown upon it by an incident in the civil war, related to me by Colonel Ball, as a true Christian as he was a courageous soldier. As he was commanding a Confederate battery at Missionary Ridge, there suddenly wheeled around the foot of the mountain on his left a strong detachment of Federal Cavalry. So unexpected was their appearance and so rapid was their approach, that he and his men were forced to abandon their guns, leaving them in the hands of the enemy, who quickly turned them around and directed their galling fire upon the feeble Confederates. As Colonel Ball rushed through the brush and woods, while the shot and shells of his own guns were whistling about his ears, he said the meaning of this passage "more than conquerors" flashed upon his mind. It meant not only defeating the enemy, but also turning his guns with deadly fire upon him. Likewise in our spiritual struggle, by faith we come to realize that temptation, disappointments, sorrow and death are designed to make us perfect through suffering.

It is said that there is but one point from which Mont Blanc rises before the eye in all its magnitude and grandeur. Certainly it is true that only from the standpoint of Christ can we see aright life in all its complex relations. Faith in him resolves many a difficulty which neither the intellect is able to penetrate nor the will, however strong, to master.—(Texas Standard.)
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