

The Young Methodist and His Bible

By
PROF. WILFRID J. MOULTON,
M.A.

WHEN Mohammed in the Koran speaks of the Christians he calls them "the people of the book." John Wesley, one of the widest readers of his age, desired above all things to be "a man of one book." We shall be good Methodists and good Christians when the Book of books keeps its rightful place in our holy of holies, and our hearts and minds are continuously strengthened by its teaching.

There is much in the sight of a Bible to stir the imagination of the most headless. This little collection of writings, from so many different authors and centuries, has been translated into almost every known language of the world. Every year one society alone, the British and Foreign Bible Society, prints and distributes five million copies of the Bible, in whole or in part. Thought calls up the vision of the great multitude that no man can number, of every tribe and nation and people and tongue, reading, as Thackeray has said, "in its awful pages, in which so many stricken hearts, in which so many tender and faithful souls have found comfort under calamity, and refuge and hope in affliction." No book has ever done what the Bible has achieved. If its history were to close to-morrow its place in universal literature would be supreme and unassailable.

Yet it may well be that some who would gladly assent to all this find the question of their own personal attitude towards the Bible one of the hardest problems of their lives. Our young people are learning in their schools and colleges some of the wonders of modern science. Geology teaches them to see the slow formation of our earth through unnumbered ages; anthropology shows them how lowly were the beginnings of the human race. Little wonder that some who have grown up with a vague idea that the Bible claims to be an infallible manual of history and of science begin to doubt whether they can honestly believe in it at all. When science and faith appear to be ranged on opposing sides the choice is hard indeed.

All that I can do in this brief paper is to suggest to any who are facing this problem one of the wisest sayings about the Bible ever uttered. When Galileo was charged with contradicting the Bible because he taught that the earth moves round the sun, whereas it is quite plain that the Bible writers think that the sun moves round the earth, he said: "The Bible was not given to teach us how the heavens go, but to teach us how to go to heaven." Both parts of that statement are true. The Bible is not a book of science, it is a book of life. For scientific truth we must patiently study God's revelation of Himself in nature. God still speaks to us in the discoveries of those who read the secrets of the long creation. But to find what God is in Himself, and what are His purposes for mankind, we must search the Scriptures.

If now we go on to ask what we find in the Bible that we can find in no other book, the answer is plain—we find Christ. We have first the story of the long preparation and discipline of the race in which He came. Next we have the story of His earthly life, His death and resurrection. Finally we have the story of the founding of His Church, and the interpretation by His own chosen apostles of the wondrous series of events through which they had lived. In the way in

THE Rev. Wilfrid J. Moulton, M.A., is the Theological Professor at the Headingly College, Leeds. He is a preacher of great ability, deeply interested in modern developments of Young People's Work, and the author of a striking volume entitled, "The Witness of Israel."

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which the truth was gradually brought to Israel are some things that surprise us. Some lessons were given through history, and some through personal experience, and others, as many scholars think, through sacred myth and allegory. Hebrew prophecy, as one writer says, has the touch of Midas, everything it touched it turned to gold. We must be ready, with open eyes, to recognize all these many modes of teaching. But because we believe in the absolute supremacy of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, God manifest in the flesh, we know that the book that contains the unique record of this unique revelation of God is itself unique.

We may add the testimony of one of the noblest and most fearless of Biblical scholars, Robertson Smith: "If I am asked why I receive Scripture as the word of God, and as the only rule of faith and life, I answer with all the fathers of the Protestant Church, 'Because the Bible is the only record of the redeeming love of God, because in the Bible alone I find God drawing near unto men in Christ Jesus, and declaring to us in Him His will for our salvation.' And this record I know to be true by the witness of His Spirit in my heart, whereby I am assured that none other than God Himself is able to speak such words to my soul."

One final word. There are some books more talked about than read, books which everyone is supposed to know, but which few find time to study. If the Bible ever loses its place among us it will be because we are more concerned to defend it than to read it. "How would you defend the Bible?" said a friend to you. "How would you defend

a lion in a cage?" was his answer. Let him out, and he'll take care of himself. Open the Book each day. Look at it in all the light of all the knowledge you can gather. Then you will know, with an ever-growing certainty, that the Bible comes from God, and will yourselves become "men of God . . . complete . . . furnishing completely unto every good work."

What Great Men Have Said About the Bible

It is necessary for the welfare of the nation that men's lives be based on the principles of the Bible.—*Theodore Roosevelt.*

The English Bible, a book which if everything else in our language should perish, would alone suffice to show the whole extent of its beauty and power.—*Lord Macaulay.*

The Bible, considered merely as literature, without any regard to its doctrines, has more strong, nervous English, more pathos, more sublimity, more pith and power, than any other work in our language.—*Dr. Spofford.*

The Bible is the most important document in the world's history. No man can be wholly uneducated who really knows the Bible, nor can any one be considered a truly educated man who is ignorant of it.—*President Schurman.*

For more than a thousand years the Bible, collectively taken, has gone hand in hand with civilization, science, law—in short, with the moral and intellectual cultivation of the species—always supporting, and often leading the way.—*Coleridge.*

Wholly apart from its religious or its ethical value, the Bible is the one book that no intelligent person who wishes to come into contact with the world of thought and to share ideas of the great minds of the Christian era, can afford to be ignorant of.—*Charles Dudley Warner.*

If I am asked to name the one comfort in sorrow, the safe rule of conduct, the true guide of life, I must point to what in the words of a popular hymn, is called "The Old, Old Story," told in an old, old Book, which is God's best and richest gift to mankind.—*William E. Gladstone.*

"Read your Bible," said Ruskin, in addressing the students at Oxford, "making it the first morning business of your life to understand some portion of it clearly, and your daily business to obey it in all that you do understand. To my early knowledge of the Bible I owe the best part of my taste in literature, and the most precious, and, on the whole, the one essential part of my education."

I think that I know my Bible as few literary men know it. There is no book in the world like it, and the finest novels ever written fall far short in interest of any one of the stories it tells. Whatever strong situations I have in my books are not of my creation, but are taken from the Bible. "The Decemviri" is the story of the Prodigal Son. "The Bondman" is the story of Esau and Jacob. "The Scapgoat" is the story of Eli and his sons, and the "Manxman" is the story of David and Uriah.—*Hall Caine.*