

Special Papers.

THE BIBLE IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS.*

BY REV. JOHN MORDY, M.A.

EVERY person who intelligently studies the subject, the Bible in Public Schools, must be specially impressed with two convictions: 1st, the tremendous importance of the subject; and 2nd, the extreme difficulty of securing the desired end. To realize the importance of the Bible in the Public Schools, we must remember that every scholar possesses a three-fold nature; a physical, which he enjoys in common with the brutes; a mental, which is higher than the physical; and the religious (in which we include the moral and spiritual) which is higher than either of the former; and the aim of every true system of education is to develop each of those natures and all of them simultaneously in such a way that no one will get an unfair advantage over the other. A true system of education must aim not only at the development of the mind, but of the whole character, and every power which it possesses.

An individual whose physical nature is thoroughly developed, to the utter neglect of the mental and religious, is only a healthy animal in human form, claiming all the attention of a man, but possessing only the characteristics of the brute. Let his mental faculties as well as his animal nature, be fully developed, while his religious is still neglected, and you have only made him more dangerous to society, as an increase of knowledge means a vast increase of power, with no means of directing it to benevolent purpose. This has been illustrated in the lives of heathen poets and artists who, though masters in their own spheres, were at the same time monsters of vice and iniquity. But let the religious nature—using the term religious according to the Bible sense of the word to include the moral and spiritual—let the religious nature be cultivated along with the other two, and it will direct the constantly increasing power of the scholar to a useful end; and make all things work together for good, not only to himself but to the community in which he lives. Let the person's religious nature be cultivated, to the neglect of the mind, and you have a first-class bigot who always imagines himself infallibly right, but has no brains by which to discover his delusion. In his fiery zeal he may talk much about salvation, but has no intelligent idea in what it consists. He can alarm others by crying fire! fire! but he cannot tell where. My argument is that in order to keep the man properly balanced, his whole nature must be developed simultaneously. While we aim like the ancient Greeks, at securing the greatest possible strength, flexibility, and beauty of body, combined with the highest development of all the mental faculties; we must not forget that it is of infinitely more importance that the scholar be brought under the influence of that knowledge which maketh wise unto salvation. "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" As in a fine piece of music you must not only have all the parts, but all the parts equally balanced, so to neglect the lower part of a man's nature is to impair the higher, while to neglect the higher is to render the lower self-destructive. Were it possible for the arms, legs, and head of a person to grow to the proportions of a giant, while his trunk remained the size of that of a dwarf, you would have a curious monster presenting to the physical eye pretty much the same appearance as a man with a well developed body and mind with an utterly neglected heart presents to the moral sense of a Christian. Let us look for a moment how this plan of keeping the three-fold nature of the scholar in perfect equilibrium was kept in view in the education of the ideal man, Jesus Christ. We read in Luke ii, 52, "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man." Here you will notice that the progressive development was simultaneous in body, mind, and spirit. If time would permit we could show that the education of the great men in Biblical and secular history approaches most nearly to this model. Moses, David, Daniel, and Paul, each began with religious

instruction and continued this, while each acquired all the learning of the country and time in which he lived.

Let me assume then, what I cannot here stop to prove, that the Bible is an inspired book, the only infallible rule of faith and manners, and it must be admitted that the only way in which the highest part of man's nature can be cultivated, is by making the Bible his constant companion from the cradle to the grave, a "lamp to his feet and a light to his path." But how can this be done unless he takes it with him to the public school, where most young people get nearly all their mental education? Let any other branch of study be neglected in the public school, and it is, in nine cases out of ten, neglected for life. A school can as well afford to be without maps and blackboards as without a Bible. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." Suppose the teacher wishes to illustrate to a class the grandeur of some noble ambition, how can he do it so effectually as by placing before their youthful minds the inspiring example of some of the noblest characters who have ever trodden this earth, and whose foot-prints may be seen in the Sacred Scriptures. If the teacher must reprove, how can he do it so gently and yet so powerfully as by a reference to the Word of God? Where will the teacher find such wonderful illustrations of the consequences of virtue and vice, such powerful motives to shun the evil and cleave to the good as in the Bible?

THE BIBLE AS A MEANS OF MENTAL TRAINING,

but simply as a means of mental improvement and equipment for the work of life. What book will compare with the Bible? As a matter of common intelligence how important to be intimately acquainted with the one infallible book which is read in over three hundred different languages and by all the most intelligent people in the world? How can we read other books or newspapers intelligently unless we have a fair knowledge of that one book from which all able authors are quoting? If the scholar is designed some day to become an author himself, and his style of writing is to be largely formed from his reading, where will he find such lofty imagery, such beautiful thoughts and expressive language as in the inspired Word of God? No matter what fields of knowledge he desires to explore, he will find this the great centre of truth from which all other branches radiate. If the scholar is to become a lawyer his best foundation is the Bible. If he is to be a doctor he ought to study the hygienic principles given to the Jews in the book of Leviticus and other parts of the Bible. If he is to be a politician the life and times of Moses are indispensable. If a business man, the Proverbs of Solomon will be his armory. If a historian, he will find that the children of Israel came in contact with the Egyptians, Philistines, Syrians, Assyrians, Medes, Persians, Greeks, and Romans, all the great nations of antiquity; and that the Christian Church came in contact with modern nations at the time when these nations had attained their highest development in arts, science, and a religion of a heathen kind; so that while sailing down the stream of Bible history and Church history, he can stop at intervals and take a look at each of the great nations at the very time when the historian is most anxious to see them. The Bible is the great river of truth which we would do well to spend our whole lives exploring. Some have time only to make a hurried trip down the middle of the stream, stopping for a moment to gaze on sacred spots like Sinai and Calvary, while they pass; while others spend nearly all the time sailing up and down this celestial stream, and find that all the branches of human knowledge are but so many tributaries, pouring into this great river which seems to broaden and deepen until it spreads out into the effulgent glory of eternal day.

2nd. The difficulty in securing thorough Biblical instruction in the public schools. The importance of securing a thorough training in the Bible will readily be admitted, especially when we compare the strength of mind and force of character manifested by those who have been trained in schools in Scotland and some parts of England, where the Bible is regularly taught, with the mental and moral imbecility of those who have grown up in

comparative ignorance of the sacred writings; but when we attempt to introduce it as a regular part of the teaching work of the school, we are beset with many difficulties.

1st. We are told that there is no time to spend on the Bible. To this we reply that, if the scholar cannot overtake everything, let him take a fair share of the most important things first, and having secured the essentials, let him take up the accomplishments as opportunity is afforded. A man might as well plead that his time was so taken up putting carpets on the floor and arranging pictures around the walls of his house, that he had no time to put a roof on it, or that as his money was all spent in buying candies and toys for his children he could not afford to get them food and clothing.

2nd. But another will say that if it be of such importance, let the parents and churches attend to it, and leave the public schools free to devote all their time to other branches. But to do this, we answer, is to allow a very large proportion of the scholars to grow up without any knowledge of the Bible; for there is a large proportion of young people who have no connection with any church, and whose parents have neither the desire nor the ability to teach them. Moreover, we affirm, that for the school to hand over a very important part of its work to the churches, argues imperfection in the school system. Certain churches or parents might teach arithmetic or any other branch, but a perfect school will aim at seeing that all its work is done, and not risk any part of it to any other agency which experience teaches is not to be depended upon.

3rd. Others will assert that if ministers of the Gospel really believe that it is so important to have the Bible taught in the public schools, they ought to avail themselves of the privilege now accorded them by law, of giving religious instructions to the scholars belonging to their own church, after four o'clock. But I think that all who understand the question will admit that no man with common sense would attempt to keep a number of reluctant prisoners after the other scholars have been dismissed. Such an arrangement would convert Bible study into a punishment and the unfortunate minister into the hateful man who inflicts it. But if it be said that any School Board has the power to grant any clergyman any other hour agreed upon, we answer that this does not better the case much; for it still compels the clergyman to limit his instructions to the scholars of his own church, and this necessitates the bringing into the public schools the sectarian walls which separate the different churches, showing to the scholars only the most offensive side of our religion, and while there might be a dispute as to what denomination certain children really belonged; there would be others connected with no church, who would get no attention. Besides, when the teachers are maintained at the public expense, why should any department of the work be dependent upon the voluntary efforts of others who may neither have the ability nor inclination to engage in it? I believe that the very best use which can be made of the Bible in public schools under the present system, is that which is made of it in this school in Niagara Falls. The Scripture lessons are read according to the regulation, important texts are written on the blackboard, memorized by the scholars, and illustrated in the lives of Christian teachers. The ministers visit the school regularly, and give such advice to both teachers and scholars, as they are able to impart, without saying a word about their church connections. The atmosphere of the school is decidedly Christian, and even if the law remains as it is, the Bible will remain a wonderful instrument for doing good in the school.

Before closing this paper, I must throw out my own little theory, and if time will not permit me to defend it, I must leave my helpless offspring to the tender mercies of the critic, trusting to his robust constitution to enable him to endure the rough handling which he may receive.

MY OWN OPINION.

My own opinion is that the Bible should be the subject of examination for every promotion of every scholar from the day he enters the public school till he graduates from the university, the examinations growing more and more difficult to suit the increasing acquisitions of the scholar as he passes

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