

Four Bibles in One Book

DR. WILLIAM ASHMORE, the veteran and venerable missionary to China, some time ago published a little book to which he gave the title, "My Four Bibles." He did not refer to four different books which, from time to time, he had purchased or which had been presented to him, but to four methods of approach to the same Bible which, in his life, followed both a chronological and logical order. Doctor Ashmore's presentation is of special interest as illustrating certain pedagogical principles, the knowledge of which is of great value to student and teacher. The Bible, as does every book of ethical and spiritual power and enlightenment, presents to people in different stages of intellectual and spiritual progress, and various needs and experiences, a different aspect of truth and helpfulness. Each person who goes to it with a desire for strength and wisdom, must approach it from the standpoint of his own case; and if he is seeking to help others, he must bring its teaching to bear upon their particular condition. He must study humanity first as man, but more intimately as men. The school teacher who does the best work knows his pupils in their home surroundings. He finds the pupil himself, and then applies himself to the task of teaching that boy or girl. This is pre-eminently true of the Sunday School teacher. He never really gets down to business until he learns to know each scholar, his mental and moral status, and finds the point of contact between him and the vital truth which he is striving to impart. Doctor Ashmore tells us that his awakening came when he realized the fact that the Bible, which was his because he had paid two dollars of his own money for it, was his also in a much more vital sense. It was his for study, his in its application of its truth. Personal appropriation of it made it a different book to him from what it could possibly be to any one else. It ought to be the aim of every teacher to make it the scholar's own book in that deeper sense.

SUNDAY SCHOOL BIBLE.

The first Bible to which Doctor Ashmore refers is the Bible as he knew it as a Sunday School scholar. He had been given a Bible as a prize for attendance and committing to memory Scripture verses. He was expected to read it regularly every day, and did manage to do so frequently. There was much of it which was obscure and beyond his understanding, the reading of which only befuddled him; but the wonderful stories of the Old Book gripped him. He went back to them again and again. The conversion of Saul made its mark. "The sudden blinding light, the terrific noise, the voice from overhead"—these things were not beyond his conception of the spectacular. The story of David and Goliath was a source of unalloyed interest. He had seen David knock Goliath over forty times, and would like to have seen him knock him over forty times more. Each time his admiration for David rose higher and higher. There was the story of Joseph. He cried when he came to the account of where his brothers sold him into Egypt; he would cry out and call them a set of villains. He wished that he was a big man like Samson, so that he could knock them right and left. When they reported to their father that Joseph had been devoured by beasts, he would shout aloud, "You are a pack of liars, the whole of you! You sold him to a lot of 'Injuns'!" Then there were the stories of the flood, and Abraham, the blind men, the raising of Lazarus, and many others. His Sunday School Bible was a book of wonderful stories in which God's love for the right was shown and evil was punished. The wise teacher will learn a lesson from his own experience, and not be unmindful of the age and enthusiasms of those he is teaching.

THEOLOGICAL STUDENT'S BIBLE.

When Doctor Ashmore passed from his earlier Sunday School days through academy and college to the theological seminary, his Bible presented an entirely new aspect. Every word and sentence was to be studied with critical accuracy. The classroom became a dissecting-room. It was now a question of grammar, rhetoric, authenticity, historicity, inspiration, and revelation. Many learned authors were quoted, and the Bible was put before him as a book to be questioned rather than as a questioner of the consciences of men. The great missionary is not so sure that this process helped him to a better understanding or a firmer faith in the book, which he was to present to the world as the word of God. He was left with a sense of uncertainty and fear lest a little more investigation should undermine the very foundations of his faith. May we not have here an illustration of a wrong method of teaching? If the Bible is trustworthy, the more minutely it is reverently studied the more assured will the student be of its value as a moral and spiritual guide. If his theological teachers had studied it with him from the standpoint of its religious motive and its adaptability to the spiritual needs of men, the student would not have gotten the impression that he was in a dissecting-room, where vivisection was being indulged in, but rather would he have thought of

himself as in a laboratory where he was being taught of the healing properties of a tree of life, so that he might minister to sin-sick souls. Doctor Ashmore's theological Bible seems to have been the least loved of him. There is always danger when the knife is used. It requires a skilful surgeon, who not only has had experience as an operator, but has profound conviction that he can save the patient's life, and that the life is worth saving. The theological teacher ought to have such experience as to convince him of the supreme value of the Bible, so that he approaches his work with a desire to unfold the glories of the Scriptures rather than to search for their defects.

YOUNG PASTOR'S BIBLE.

Doctor Ashmore settled as a young pastor at Hamilton, Ohio. His course at the theological seminary had made him rather timid about the use of the Bible. The theories of learned men had been quoted so much, that he had come to look upon the book as a labyrinth which needed a scholarly guide to pilot him through its mazes; and yet these guides differed so much among themselves that a formidable "if" reared its head at every turn in the road. One day, after reading much of what others had said about the Bible, it came to him like a revelation, that he might get more light by making a diligent study of the Bible itself. Why should he always go to some one else to learn what was taught in the Bible when the very book was lying on his desk almost unknown to him? He began by putting himself among the brethren at Ephesus. In spirit he joined the church at Ephesus, and the letter was written to him. Could he understand that letter? He would do all in his power to know just what the one-time pastor had to say to him. That letter was food to his soul. It let him into the secret of a happy Christian life. Thus he took up one letter after another. Thus he studied the whole New Testament. He would find out for himself what Jesus and the early Christians taught. He would dig for it. There was no reason why these learned commentators should have a monopoly of access to the truths of the Bible. This attitude toward the book made Bible study the most delightful occupation of his life. It enabled him to bring its truths to his people with such freshness and power that it revolutionized the church. They were better natured toward each other; they came out to prayer-meetings in larger numbers; they enjoyed the sermons better; and they lived better Christian lives. He no longer preached truth second-hand—he had made his Bible his own.

MISSIONARY BIBLE.

When Doctor Ashmore sailed for China he had a few books which he attempted to read during the long voyage, but his mind constantly reverted to his Bible. He was going out among people very different from those at home; they were educated differently; they thought differently upon almost every subject. It was his business to understand this people, and it was his business to study his Bible in reference to their particular needs. He soon found that the Bible was a wonderful missionary book. That even the Old Testament was in law, and psalm, and prophecy a missionary book. He saw that it was rich in historical incidents, which had in them the missionary element. He found in his Bible the answer to many of the questions which would inevitably arise in the minds of the devotees of other religions. As he studied with the heathen in view, his Bible became a missionary book with an inexhaustible mine of truth applicable to those among whom he was to work. He thus entered upon his task with faith and joy; for he had something to offer to the Chinaman as he had had something to offer to his people among the Ohio hills. He was also prepared to study the peculiar characteristics of the Chinaman in the light of his deeper knowledge of God's purpose toward those who were afar off. Doctor Ashmore's career in China has been a striking illustration of the value of his method of approach to men with the Bible. He came to be recognized as a great friend of the Chinese. He believed in them, because he had studied them from the missionary point of view which is revealed in the Bible, and he came to be known as a most successful apostle of the Christian religion, because he had learned how to apply the truths of the Bible to the spiritual condition of the Chinese.—*Walter Calley, in Service.*

The Second Vice-President

Makes the Bible his supreme text-book.
Informs himself regarding the Field.
Scatters Missionary Literature widely.
Systematically plans his Campaign.
Interests the whole League in the Forward Movement.
Organizes his Committee for united work.
Never desponds of success.
Stands solidly for Christ's Great Commission.