

Messenger and Visitor

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THE BIBLE FOR MAN.

In this scientific age it is impossible that anything in the form of literature, however long and sacredly cherished, can escape the ordeal of critical investigation, and the critical examination of our sacred writings by reverent and competent scholarship in the fullest light which archaeology and all the assured results of modern science can afford is not something which we need to deplore. It is wise for us to regard it rather as being in the providential order of events. There would be no wisdom and no advantage in holding a theory of the Bible not in harmony with the well established results of science. But on the other hand we need not fear that criticism will destroy the Bible or make it less valuable to coming generations than it has been in the past. All that we know of the Bible justifies the belief that the more profoundly it is studied and the better it is known the more salutary will be its influence upon mankind.

What gives the Bible value for men is not simply that it is a word of God. We can conceive of a revelation of God made to beings quite different from ourselves, with other faculties and other needs than ours. Such a word of God might have little significance and little help for us. But the Bible is for men and it comes to us through men. Its voice is not uttered from some awful, far-off height and in language which no man can understand. The voice and the language are human and the reverent reader hears God speaking to him in the Bible as a man speaks with his friend. For the divine word comes to us through those who are touched with a feeling of our infirmities—who are tempted in all points like ourselves.

The Bible is not something separate or separable from human life as if the Divine Hand had written the word on tablets of stone or inscribed it on the face of the heavens. It not only relates itself to human needs, but it grows out of human experience. Much of it is all quick and tremulous with human emotion. As one reads its pages he comes in contact with all sorts and conditions of men. It reflects the basest and noblest passions of humanity. Every kind of man may see himself reflected in the mirror which it holds up to view. It has a voice for every mood of the dejected soul, from its profoundest sorrow to its most exultant joy. If the Bible is the most divine of books, it is also the most truly human. Its revelation of God is inseparable from its revelation of man. It is this that gives the Bible its unique fascination and value for mankind; it is this which, to use the phrase of Coleridge, gives it the power of leading us at greater depths of our being than any other book.

The Bible is its own most effective vindicator. If men will but come to it with an open mind and a reverent spirit, seeking truth with the purpose of conforming their lives thereto when it is found, the truth and the consequent authority of the Bible will be made manifest in their consciences. This practical attitude toward the Bible and its teachings is of the highest importance. It is immeasurably more important than the critical attitude which approaches the Bible with the purpose of mastering the principles and results of historical criticism. We may go further and say that a reverent attitude toward the Bible and an honest disposition to accept and obey its truth as far as discovered is vastly more important than any theory, however firmly held, of the inerrancy of the Scriptures. It is surely far better that one should recognize a part of the Bible as God's truth and faithfully seek to realize that truth in his life than that he should profess to accept the Book from cover to cover as unquestionably inspired by God, and then order his life in utter disregard of its precepts and its principles.

It is recorded that to those who questioned the truth of his teachings Jesus said: "If any man is willing to do his will he shall know of the teaching whether it be of God or whether I speak from myself." The same principle, we may feel sure, holds true in respect to the study of the Bible today. The test of true discernment, the condition of attaining to knowledge and assurance of the truth, is the willingness to do God's will. Those who go to the

Bible in such a spirit, we cannot doubt, will discover there treasures far above all that is contained in all other books. They will find their profoundest experiences interpreted, their truest aspirations clarified and expressed, their deepest longings met and satisfied. They will find truth which is able to make wise unto salvation. They will not indeed find the answer to all questions, the solution of all difficulties—for the revelation is not completed and as yet we see but as in a mirror obscurely—but they will find the path which leads to repentance and peace. They will find the bliss of fellowship with God in Jesus Christ, the illumination of the Divine Spirit and the power of the eternal life. It is surely of vastly greater importance so to use the Bible as to secure these results than to be acquainted with all the processes and results of the historical criticism or even to be able to give unwavering assent to the doctrine of the Bible's absolute inerrancy.

GREATNESS THROUGH SERVICE.

The lesson of sacrifice and self-abnegation is not easy to learn, and we need not be surprised if we find, as we do in our Bible lesson for this week, that the best of the disciples of Jesus had not mastered the lesson at the time when they were following their Lord up to Jerusalem to witness the final scenes in his life and his ministry. And we must not be too hasty or too severe in our condemnation of these disciples for this evidence on their part of ambitious self-seeking in respect to the things of the Kingdom. It is true that the request which they preferred evinced an ambitious desire to excel their brethren. They were thinking of their own interests rather than those of others. They wanted to be accounted great in the Kingdom of Heaven and to have the preeminence over others. But their aim was not altogether ignoble, for it was linked to faith and love. According to Mark's narrative it was just after the Lord had spoken to his disciples of his approaching suffering and death that the request of the sons of Zebedee was preferred. They had heard him declare that he was to be rejected by the leaders of the people, that he was to be condemned, and after being mocked, scourged and treated with utmost ignominy, put to death. But this had not shaken their confidence and hope in Jesus. Still he was their Lord and King, and they were ready to follow wherever he might lead. They would drink of his cup and be baptized with his baptism. In spite of all that others might say or do and in spite of all that Jesus had predicted of his own humiliation, they so loved him and so believed in him and in his ultimate triumph that to have his promise of the chief places of honor in his coming kingdom was the object of their highest ambition.

There is another reason, too, why we should not be hasty to condemn the sons of Zebedee, for in passing judgement upon them it is quite possible that we should be found condemning ourselves. It is not easy always even for those who are making their pilgrimage in the light of Calvary and the resurrection to escape the domination of the self-seeking spirit. How natural it is to desire a position of honor, to seek a foremost place, to make our service conditional upon our own estimate of our abilities being recognized and the place which we think we are fitted to adorn being accorded to us! Doubtless we have been believed and loved. We have wept at Calvary, we have rejoiced in the resurrection, we have seen how in the death and resurrection of Jesus the Prince of this world has been judged. But do we quite succeed in gaining the mastery over that old self which so persistently seeks its own aggrandizement? How apt we are to demand that we shall have a seat of honor or at least a comfortable position as a condition of rendering cheerful service to our Lord!

We shall do well to ponder deeply the answer of Jesus to the ambitious request of his disciples. He gently rebukes their self-seeking spirit, but he does not tell them that greatness is not attainable in the Kingdom of Heaven, and he does not discourage the pursuit of the path by which alone true greatness can be reached. Jesus points out the mistake of the disciples in supposing that greatness in his kingdom can be bestowed in any factitious way. Those who would be nearest to himself in the day of his triumph must be nearest to him in the day of his suffering and humiliation. Were they able to drink of his cup and to be baptized with his baptism? Yes, they said, and perhaps they were speaking more wisely than they knew, for they could have known but little of what the grace of God was yet to do for them. But a seat of honor in the kingdom of Heaven was not a matter of appointment even by Jesus himself. It was for those for whom it had been prepared, it was for those who in the divine way should prepare themselves for it by most faithfully doing the will of God. Our Lord is careful to point out to his disciples the radical difference between the world's idea of greatness and the idea of greatness which is recognized and realized in the kingdom of heaven. In the one case the aim is lordship merely, in the other it is service, and it is true service alone which gives the right to real lordship. Yet the Christian is not to serve in order that he may attain to fame as a reward for service. He is to be great by serving. Service is the proof and the fruit of faith and love. He who serves best, loves most and is greatest. The supreme greatness of Jesus is manifested by service. The name that is above

every name belongs to him who took the lowliest place and became servant of all. Worldly ambition is apt to pursue its aim in the spirit of the wolf, the robber, the hireling. The Christian if he is true to his divine ideal seeks to serve in the spirit of the Good Shepherd who is ready to lay down his life for the sheep.

Editorial Notes.

—In view of the fact that five recent graduates of McGill University are to go out this summer to Foreign Mission fields—three to India and two to China—a committee representing all the Protestant churches in Montreal has arranged for a union mass meeting to be held May 26 in St. James Methodist church, at which the five young men will speak. It is expected the meeting will be the largest union meeting ever held in Montreal.

—The Watchman says that Columbian University, Washington, D. C., which was founded by the Baptists, and was recently taken out from denominational control, has now been offered by the Washington Memorial Association half a million dollars to build a group of buildings on its new location, provided the name be changed to George Washington University. The matter is under consideration by President George C. Needham.

—The three great societies of the Baptists of the Northern States hold their anniversaries this week in the city of Cleveland. Cleveland is a city of more than 400,000 people representing many nationalities. The city has twenty nine Baptist churches with a membership of 5,400. The meetings are to be held in the Euclid Avenue church, which is the largest of the Baptist churches of Cleveland, and is ministered to by Rev. C. A. Eaton, D. D., one of the large number of able men whom the Baptists of these Maritime Provinces have given to their brethren in the United States.

—Most persons, even Christians, have a better and a worse side. When a good man turns the less lovely side of himself toward us, and especially if he does it in such a way as to crowd our own self-esteem uncomfortably, we may be in danger of thinking that he is unlovely all the way through. Under such circumstances it may be profitable to spend a little time in enquiring whether, after all, he has not many qualities which entitle him to our esteem. We should not be too much disturbed if now and then a friend exhibits an unlovely streak, and if we ourselves are altogether without blemish that should enable us to deal the more magnanimously with others.

—After noting a number of recent cases in which indulgence in strong drink has led to crime or to the sudden death of the drinker, *The Religious Intelligencer* says: "These are only sample cases. The same thing is occurring every day. The process is slower in most cases and the ending is in less startling circumstances, but the end is the same. What can be said of a traffic which lives and thrives by such slaughter? It is the gigantic crime of crimes. And those who are engaged in it are verily guilty of the blood of their numberless victims. What should be the attitude of good citizens towards such a traffic? Think of it. There is something that every one can do to help destroy the destroyer. Do it."

—In the course of a brief review of the life of Dean Farrar, recently published, the Rev. R. J. Campbell, successor to the late Dr. Parker at the City Temple, London, says: "The bibliography of Farrar's works given at the beginning of the volume exhibits at once the strength and weakness of his mental powers and range of erudition. His susceptibility to nascent ideas was wonderful, as was his power of seizing them and giving them expression. But not so was his capacity for giving them effect. His phenomenal culture was too general for accuracy, his style too ornate for intensity, and his mental organism just stopped short of the highest. His versatile intellect could do almost anything except turn the first sod in a new field."

—That is a beautiful little parable which J. R. Miller tells of the palm tree:

"The palm tree, the Arab says, stands with its feet in salt water and its head in the sun. Oftentimes they cannot drink the water found in the oasis where it grows, it is so brackish. Then they tap the trees and drink the sweet palm wine which flows out. The tree, by the magic of its inner life, so changes the elements found in the unkindly soil around it that they are made to minister unto its growth, strength and fruitfulness. It takes the evil of its environment and transmutes it into spiritual life. It is possible for us to live as it were, with our feet in the mire of sin's bitterness, with noxious influences all about us, our life smitten meanwhile by fierce temptations, and yet yield for the blessing of others the fruit of love and holiness. If we have Christ in us there is a magic power in our life which rejects the evil and assimilates the good, which takes the evil and transforms it into the good. The world has no power to harm us if our life be hid with Christ in God."

—In the course of an address delivered at the annual meeting of the Pastors' College, London, Dr. Robertson Nicoll, speaking in reference to the zeal for souls, said: "It is this zeal for souls which glows in Mr. Spurgeon's writings as perhaps in no others. The fire never burned low on the altar of his heart. His love for souls came from his love and devotion to the Son of God who died for them. When he stood up in the pulpit he spoke as one who was sure of this opportunity for himself and his hearers, as one