

instruction, and points out the means by which the reading of it may become for the Christian a profitable exercise.

It cannot be denied, as St. Austin has observed, that the inspired volume "is accessible to all, though few are capable of penetrating the depths of knowledge which it contains. In those matters which it plainly discloses, it speaks in the language of friendship to the learned and the unlearned." How sublime the wisdom which it teaches man; and how impressively does it address itself to his heart! He finds in its elevated truths a principle that exalts the soul, that places it on a level with the high destiny for which it has been created, that throws indeed an aspect of uncertainty and change over human things, but substitutes in their stead the bright and lasting realities of a spiritual world, which alone have the power of satisfying the aspirations of our heart. In the pages of the inspired book the loftiest genius will find matter for contemplation and a source of comfort, while at the same time it conveys instruction and consolation to the least cultivated minds. There are no circumstances of life in which it may not be consulted with advantage, because the heavenly lessons which it imparts are directed to the regulation of our actions according to the law of God, which is a point of daily and constant application. How many powerful considerations does it present to the sinful man for the reformation of his conduct; how vividly does it portray to the worldling the cheating vanity of those objects which he so fondly pursues; how eloquently does it enforce the claims of virtue and the precepts of eternal life! How effectual is the solace which it imparts in the hour of trial and affliction, and how secure the refuge which it offers at all times to those who, tossed about on the stormy sea of life, are in continual danger of spiritual shipwreck! The apostle St. Paul has summed up the benefits which it confers, in these few words: "All scripture inspired of God is profitable to teach, to reprove, to correct, to instruct in justice, that the man of God may be perfect, furnished to every good work."

The conviction that the most salutary results follow from a judicious use of the holy Scriptures, has always led the Catholic church to employ them as an effectual means of sanctification among her children, and as an armor of strength in the hands of those who have been appointed to defend the cause of truth against the assaults of its adversaries. In fact, in the primitive days of religion, the sacred writers, although led by particular circumstances to record the truths and facts connected with the establishment of Christianity, addressed themselves to the faithful in general. Such was the object of the four Gospels, and the different Epistles that have been left to the church. Hence

St. Paul, in his first Epistle to the Corinthians, chapter first, uses the following language: "To the church of God that is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that invoke the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place of theirs and ours." It was a common practice also for the early fathers to urge upon the people the utility of consulting the inspired volume. St. Austin endeavored to withdraw their attention from vain and dangerous amusements, by representing to them the happy influence of the word of God, which alone can satisfy the desires of an immortal soul, in the real blessings which it offers in time and in eternity.

"It is my opinion," says Fenelon, "that many writers have given themselves a very needless degree of trouble to prove what cannot be called in question, namely, that the laity were wont to read the Bible during the first ages of the church. To be convinced of this, we need only consult the works of St. Chrysostom. Thus, for example, he says, in his preface to the Epistle to the Romans, that 'he bitterly regrets that many of the faithful do not understand St. Paul as they should do; and that the ignorance of some is so great as not even to know the number of his epistles.' 'The reason of this disorder,' he adds, 'arises from the circumstances of their not assiduously reading the writings of the apostles!' He moreover states that the 'ignorance of the holy Scriptures is the source both of the contagion of heresies and of the corruption of morals.' 'They,' he says, 'who turn not their eyes to the rays of the Scriptures, fall necessarily into errors and into the commission of frequent faults.' These reproaches were addressed to the laity, who attended the sermons of the saint.

"Saint Jerom, instructing Læta respecting the education of her daughter, tells her that, 'as soon as the child is somewhat older, her parents should find her constantly employed in the sanctuary of the Scriptures, consulting there the prophets and the apostles concerning her spiritual nuptials.'—'Let her,' he adds, 'bring back to you, each day, the fruits of her regular work, which will be a collection of flowers culled from the Scriptures. Let her learn first a certain number of the Greek verses, and then instruct her by the Latin version. 'Teach her,' he says, 'to love the sacred books in preference to precious stones and robes of silk. Let her learn by heart the Psalms. Let her know the proverbs of Solomon relating to the rules of life. Let her, from the ecclesiast, be engaged to trample under foot the vanity of worldly things; and, from the book of Job, to imitate the examples of courage and resignation. From these instructive lessons let her proceed to the Gospels, and let