

THE INCIDENTAL ADVANTAGES OF STUDY OF THE BIBLE.

I sincerely believe that nothing offers so good a subject for study as the Bible. Set aside now the fact that it is a religious book, and all religious considerations, and regard it simply as a book to be studied; there is no other so at hand, none so easily studied, none in which such aids may be found, none that will introduce you to so large a company of fellow-students; and there is no book the study of which brings so many advantages as the Bible, because there is no other one book that embraces so many departments of truth and knowledge, or treats them in so wise a way. It has been said that to know well some persons is equivalent to a liberal education. So a thorough knowledge of the Bible—I do not mean ability to quote it, but an intellectual knowledge of the Bible—is equivalent to an education; it is itself an education, and as broad and high as that gained in the schools. It does this because it is so universal.

Look at it as a book of history. Upon the whole there is no study that so broadens the mind and feeds it so richly and sweetly as history. It brings the wisdom of the ages together; it teaches charity by showing us under what burdens and by what paths of suffering humanity has struggled on; it shows us that there is a plan and a power at work beyond that of man; and, above all, it reveals an upward progress, and so feeds home and stimulates to good efforts. But to produce this effect, history must be studied in a large way, and as covering broad reaches of time. The Bible presents itself to us first of all as a history; that is the form which it wears. It is first a history of creation; no matter now how it is told, it is yet in some real sense a history of the creation of the universe; a very important thing to know, for a man has no sure standing ground until he knows the main facts and features of the world in which he finds himself. De Foe, with a fine stroke of genius, makes Robinson Crusoe first of all explore the island on which he is cast away. One must feel *at home* before one can do any good work. Hence the Bible opens with a historical account—as good as could then be given, and, all things considered none could be better—of the world from the beginning. It does not depart from this method, but is a history to the end. The early, unknown ages are depicted in the only light in which they were revealed until the true historic era began in Abraham. From that time on we follow, as we turn the pages of the Bible, a line of history till we reach the end. It is indeed the history of a small nation; but suppose you were to study it in true student fashion, you would find yourself face to face with those most ancient civilizations that flourished about the head-waters of the Euphrates. They form the background of the history of the Hebrew nation, and are part of it. You would study those nations in the light of the wonderful discoveries that are now being made, and by which their history is literally unrolled from buried cylinders. Then you would find yourself in contact with Egypt, whose history is parallel for 1,200 years with that of the Hebrews. The relation between the two nations was that of action and reaction; one cannot be understood without a knowledge of the other; hence the student of the Bible will learn all there is to be known of Egypt. The relation of Abraham to Mesopotamia, and the influences he brought from it and against which he protested, and the relations of Moses to Egypt, the ideas, customs, and torcs carried thence by the Hebrews, form one of the most significant chapters in human history, and have not yet been fully written out. The effect of France and Germany upon England, the effect of the Crusades upon Europe through contact with the East, the effect of Arabic learning upon mediæval Europe, are great themes, but they are not more important than the bearing of the prehistoric nature-worship of the remote East upon the genesis of the Hebrew nation, and the influence of Egypt upon the tribe of Jacob, and later, the interaction between the Israelites and the Canaanites, and later still, the powerful influence of Babylon enslaving and teaching its Jewish captives.