

afford an additional proof of the impropriety of placing it indiscriminately in the hands of men whose minds are necessarily rude and uncultivated.

"Man must cultivate the ground for his corporeal, the mind for his intellectual food. His proficiency in every science is proportioned to the skill of his instructor, the time, the toil, and talents expended in the study of it. In literature and the arts, it is the same. In every trade, occupation, and profession, manual dexterity, or intellectual excellence, can be acquired only by previous discipline, and long habits of bodily or mental action. But are the deep study, patient investigation, and the vigorous exercise of reason, necessary to the attainment of all human knowledge; and will the knowledge of ourselves as fallen creatures, as moral and reprehensible agents,—will the knowledge of God, of his attributes, of his will, of the doctrines he inculcates, of the duties he prescribes, of his precepts, promises, exhortations, denunciations, and of his whole scheme of redemption, will all this knowledge—deep, various, and sublime as it is,—be extracted from the Bible by ignorant rustics and mechanics, unassisted by oral or written elucidation? It would be highly desirable that the peasantry of Ireland understood and respected the laws of their country more than they do at present; yet no society has yet started up with the avowed object of dispensing among them cheap editions of Blackstone, or Coke's Littleton, without note or comment. A competent knowledge of natural philosophy, astronomy, metaphysics, and political economy, could not fail to humanize their minds; yet no sagacious reformer has yet come forward with a proposal for circulating among them Newton, Laplace, Locke, Smith, or Stewart, without note or comment. Why? because these books would not be read, or read to some useless or pernicious purpose. This applies with infinitely greater force to the Bible; for as it is the best of all books its perversion is proportionably dangerous. Beware, then, how you entrust the Bible, indiscriminately, to the multitude, and then abandon them to the licentious glosses of their own wild imaginations.

"Oral instruction should be used to a considerable extent, in teaching them Christianity. Their oral instruction should be aided by summary views of the doctrines of our religion; plainly written, clearly arranged, and extracted from the Scriptures by men of sound heads and honest hearts. Interesting narratives, grounded on scripture history, written with clearness and elegance, and leading to some useful moral, or illustrating some important doctrine, should be put into their hands. Select extracts from the Scriptures themselves, with short explanatory notes, and an occasional paraphrase, may be judiciously introduced into the poor man's library.—If he has the Bible, such works may guard him against the wild licentiousness of interpretation; if he has not, they may make him a meek and peaceable Christian, instead of a turbulent and dangerous enthusiast. *He cannot use, he must abuse the Bible. Trust not to his*

*own reason, his private judgment; he has none; or which is sufficient for my argument, he has not enough, and therefore the Bible should not be industriously put into his hands, because it is too obscure for his rude understanding. This is the conclusion to which we are equally hurried, whether we consider the antiquity of the sacred writings; their figurative language; their oriental idioms; their highly diversified style; their subject matter; the important ends answered by their obscurity; the analogy of the divine dispensations; THE NUMEROUS SECTS INTO WHICH CHRISTIANS HAVE BEEN RENT; the torrents of fanaticism, which have swept away civil and religious establishments, while all these sects, and all these fanatics appeal to Scripture for a vindication of their opinions and a justification of their atrocities.*

"The bulk of mankind must be content to glean up their information from others. They cannot approach the great sources of knowledge. They must receive the most important truths, as in medicine, law, morality, physics, and mathematics, at second hand—on the authority of those who derive them from the fountain head. With respect to Christian knowledge, the same process has, in general, been observed; and where it has been departed from in any considerable degree, society has been shaken to its centre.

"The great triumphs of Christianity over Heathenism, Idolatry, and Infidelity, have been achieved, in all ages, by PREACHING the Scripture, by expounding the Scripture, by pressing its momentous truths, with the clearness and energy of oral illustration, on the attention of a reluctant, and unbelieving world. But no history records any considerable conquest over Heathenism or Mahometanism, by the mere instrumentality of the Bible;—a fact strongly corroborative of the position, 'that the Scriptures are hard to be understood.' The commission which the Apostles received from their Divine Master was; 'GO, PREACH THE GOSPEL TO EVERY CREATURE:' not a word about circulating the Bible with or without note or comment. And though the Scriptures were translated into various languages, in the early ages of the Christian church, we have reason to think they were designed for the use of believers, not of unbelievers—for persons already converted to christianity: not for those who yet remained to be converted. If the circulation of the Bible were the right mode of converting the Heathen, may we not be permitted to suppose, that, in the arrangement of Providence, the invention of printing would have preceded the promulgation of Christianity, as this circulation might thus be cheaply, easily, and rapidly effected: especially, as God could have as easily annexed miraculous powers to the sacred volume, as to the persons of the Apostles. Hence it can scarcely be doubted that preaching is the appointed way for the conversion of infidels.

"In truth, it is principally because the Scriptures are very voluminous, and very difficult, that a necessity arose of instituting a distinct order of men, prepared by long discipline, and severe stu-

dy, for the important duty of collecting, exhibiting, expounding, and illustrating the doctrines and precepts of the sacred writings. But let the public be once convinced, that tinkers and draymen are qualified to search the Scriptures, to overcome their difficulties, and comprehend their doctrines, and all respect for the clerical order is that moment at an end. In point of fact, accordingly we find that the more enthusiastic sects either have no spiritual teachers at all, or none regularly educated for the ministry. The Scriptures, they conceive, have no difficulties, for *them*: they do not stand in need of human interpreters; they derive their knowledge from a higher and purer source than any earthly teacher. Nay some enthusiasts, soaring above their fellows, or rather arguing more correctly, have rejected the Bible itself, as unnecessary to men favoured with immediate revelation.

"But were the Bible as easy as it is difficult still it would be a work of charity to condense its doctrines into a short and well arranged system, and spare the bewildered peasant the labor of pushing his researches through so vast a volume, and such multifarious matter, for the purpose of collecting and arranging for himself. *It is cruel to set him adrift, in his own little bark, on the immense ocean of divine revelation, without star or compass to guide him.* An educated man, unacquainted with revelation, may obtain a clearer view of the whole Christian scheme from a small duodecimo volume, read in a few hours, than he can from the Bible in as many months. This holds incomparably stronger with respect to the uneducated peasant; from such a work he would derive more religious knowledge in a few days, than he could from the Bible during his whole life.

"The truth is, the Bible is already too much read by Protestant peasants, and too much neglected by Protestant Gentlemen. Among the latter, accordingly, we find that honor is too frequently substituted for morality, etiquette for religion, gaming for reflection, and gallantry for devotion. The Sportsman's Calendar is read; the novel devoured; the play admired; the Bible merely tolerated. Thus, religious ignorance, which should only be found among the beasts that perish, rises in spite of the grossness of its nature, into the highest ranks of fashion, from which it sheds its blighting influence on all the subordinate classes. What a perverse and inconsistent being is man! Those who can understand the Bible, seldom read it, and content themselves with recommending it to those who cannot; while those to whom it is recommended, often read it with avidity, seldom understand it, and generally pervert it to their own destruction!"

This sagacious observer of "the signs of times" is not afraid to avow his opinions. He thinks that the labours of the Bible Society will produce at home less fruit than is expected, or fruit in abundance, but of a poisonous quality; and will be almost unproductive abroad; that it may be fairly doubted whether their distribution of Bibles will of itself, promote, in any sensible degree, the cause