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CHRIST AND THE TIME SPIRIT.

BY REV. HARRIS E. KIRK,

*Pastor of the Franklin Street Presbyterian Church,
BALTIMORE, MD.*

It is recorded in the opening verses of the sixteenth chapter of Matthew, that when the Pharisees and Sadducees demanded a sign from Christ as a proof of his divine mission, our Lord replied, "A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas." His enemies knew that Christ would refuse a sign, and hoped that his refusal would be taken by the common people as a tacit confession that he could not give it, hence would lead to his rejection. The demand for a sign was a question of a wicked and adulterous generation, a manifestation of the time spirit. The time spirit attached abnormal importance to signs and wonders as evidence of divine revelation. A refusal to gratify this unspiritual curiosity would be regarded as a confession of inability to account for his claims as Messiah.

The time spirit — the Germans call it the *Zeitgeist* — is the medium of thought through which Christianity is transmitted in a given age. As light partakes of the nature of the atmosphere through which it passes, so does the conception of Christianity depend somewhat upon the medium of thought which transmits it; and since this thought medium is a product of the life of the age, the time spirit is really the judgment of the age upon itself. In this case it was a wicked and adulterous generation seeking after a sign.

The spirit of our own time differs in one important particular from this. There is nothing of brutal rejection of Christ in it. Christ is admired and revered; Christian institutions are

BIBLE STUDY IN RELATION TO MODERN LITERATURE.

BY MINNIE G. MACHEN,
BALTIMORE, MD.

THE assertion is often made nowadays that people no longer have that familiarity with the Bible which has hitherto made it a treasury upon which our writers and public speakers might draw at will for strong phrases and effective illustrations. In the past an orator might safely take for granted that his audience were minutely familiar with the lives of Joshua and of Gideon, of Saul and of Hezekiah, and thus, by an apt reference to some incident in Hebrew history, he could conjure up an animated mental picture which would convey his thought with unflinching emphasis. But now, it is said, such illustration would fail of comprehension in a generation which does not habitually read or study the Bible.

That there is some apparent foundation of truth in this allegation is a lamentable fact. The beautiful Bible stories are not always and as a matter of course made part of a child's education, and too often professing Christians know little more of the sacred books than the disconnected passages which they hear read in church. That daily reading of the Bible, by which its musical language and its strong words of admonition were so incorporated into the memory, is not so generally considered as it once was, both a duty and a privilege. Ignorance of the Bible is no longer thought to be a palpable disgrace.

However, indications are strong that this decline in familiarity with the Bible is but the reflex motion of a wave. Those of us, indeed, who accept the Scriptures as the Word of God are willing to wait. We may say with Gamaliel, "If this counsel or this work be of men it will come to nought; but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it." But evidence of a steadily growing interest in Bible study is not wanting—evidence which will appeal to all thoughtful men, observers of current events, readers of the signs of the times.

The truth is, that the methods of Bible-study have, during the last half century, been undergoing a process of evolution. When Luther unchained the Bible from the monastic desk and handed it out to the world, it was eagerly received by a people who had been suffering from a famine, "not a famine of bread nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord." They accepted it with simple faith, and taught their children to cherish it as the only infallible rule of faith and practice. Then arose a period of doubt. The discoveries of geology seemed to discredit the biblical account of the creation, and the Darwinian theory to call in question man's supremacy over the lower animals. Many became apostate from the faith of their fathers, and all had to readjust their interpretation of some portions of the Scriptures. The sacred books were subjected to the fierce and sometimes distorting light of the "Higher Criticism." The world had arrived at a stage of development analogous to that which comes to every thoughtful youth when his traditional creed is brought to judgment before the tribunal of his awakening intellect. Is there any harm in that?

"No, when the fight begins within himself,
A man's worth something."

"The more of doubt, the stronger faith, I say,
If faith o'ercomes doubt."

So, in the history of the church, as of the individual man, many a quicksand of unbelief must be crossed, many a thicket of perplexity must be traversed before the feet are firmly planted upon the mountain-top of a reasonable faith.

At the present time, however, the benefits of all this unrest are at last becoming manifest. The Bible is the subject of more attention than ever before. Editions have multiplied within the past twenty years in a manner which is characterized by the Secretary of the American Bible Society as "rapid and unprecedented." We have the Cambridge Bible, the Temple Bible, the Modern Reader's Bible, the New Century Bible, the Variorum Bible, the Triglot Bible, the Polychrome Bible, and a host of others. Some of these special editions emphasize the devotional import of the Bible; some are more concerned with its historic and literary aspects, and others again bring out with more or less reverence minute points of criticism. Commenta-

ries, Dictionaries, Concordances have kept pace with these various editions of the Bible. In this connection, a fact brought to my attention through the librarian of one of our large public libraries,¹ may prove interesting and suggestive, namely, that nearly every work in their catalogue relating to the exegesis of Scripture has been either published or republished in the last decade. This statement does not include the old general commentaries, but refers to the more definite forms of exegesis.

Now, in the promulgation of literature, as in other enterprises, the demand regulates the supply. The publication of a large and increasing number of books upon a given subject, and especially the republication of books upon that subject, indicates a proportional increase in the number of people who are interested in the matter in hand. There must be readers for these many editions of the Bible and books about the Bible.

Then look at some facts about Bible-study. Since Mr. Moody started his first conference of students for Bible-study, in 1886, three other conferences for a like purpose have been organized: at Lake Geneva, Asheville and Pacific Grove. In the summer of 1902, fourteen hundred and four young men, representing three hundred and ninety-eight institutions, attended these conferences.² During the summer just ended the attendance increased to two thousand young men from four hundred and fifty colleges.³ The Bible classes under the auspices of the American Young Men's Christian Associations now enroll four times as many members as four years ago.⁴ The students from educational institutions of the country enrolled in Bible classes numbered, in the year 1900, two thousand; in 1904, twenty-five thousand.⁵ In 1902-'3, Princeton University reported one hundred and seventy Bible students, and Yale two hundred and thirty-four; in 1903-'4, Princeton three hundred and sixty-two, and Yale five hundred.⁶ Some one has said, "Statistics are misleading." But such figures as these must mean something.

Whether or not, however, the conclusion be accepted that Bible study is again on the increase, the fact remains that

¹ The Enoch Pratt Library of Baltimore.

² Year Book of Y. M. C. A. for 1902.

³ Statistics in *Intercollegian*, June, 1904.

⁴ Year Book of Y. M. C. A. for 1902.

⁵ Statistics in *Intercollegian*, June, 1904.

familiarity with the Bible is taken for granted not only by our great masters of style who are "free of all the four corners of language," but also by the editors of our current newspapers. Take, for example, *The Nation*, a periodical more admirable for the good English of its editorials than for any leaning towards orthodox Christianity. In the edition of July 9, 1904, for instance, the editorial columns disclose at least five scriptural allusions, as follows: "Nevertheless, the Hearst and Bryan combination, with the whole following from the cave of Adullam, will be in a hopeless minority," an allusion to 1 Sam. xxii. 1, 2. "Who do not wish to see our strongholds of learning taken by the Philistines." "The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life" (1 John ii. 16). "The implication is clear that no one could be expected to vote for him without getting thirty pieces of silver" (Matt. xxvi. 14, 15). "Thackeray is a greater than Stevenson," an obvious parody of Luke xi. 31.

In *The Nation* of August 4th are found two rather striking allusions to the life of Moses:

"He smote the rock of financial offence, and folly gushed forth;" and "One would imagine that, yesterday, England found India, as Pharaoh's daughter the waif, Moses." Here are two pregnant scriptural allusions from a Baltimore daily paper: "From a little seed of fact has grown a great mustard-tree of knowledge." "The voice is the voice of Mr. ———, but the hand is the hand of the Pennsylvania railroad." The satirical force of this last assertion would surely be lost upon a reader unfamiliar with the story of Jacob's personation of Esau. Clearly, the writers for our periodical press have not given up making allusions to the Bible.

Not less apparent is the Bible's influence upon the speech of scholars — men who, by reason of their literary or scientific attainments, are called to lecture upon lofty themes before academic audiences. Of this fact a remarkable illustration is furnished by the last one of the Ingersoll lectures, delivered at Harvard University by Dr. William Osler, of the Johns Hopkins University, and now (October, 1904) just published in book form. The subject, "Science and Immortality," is not one with which the Scriptures have to do, since the Bible never teaches science. And even in the learned lecturer's *confessio fidei* at the close, the gospel is not allowed to shine in upon the gloom and

perplexity resultant upon the contemplation of the "germ plasm." Nevertheless, this lecture is full of the Bible. Its forty-three small pages contain forty-one biblical allusions and quotations. On page 35, seven scriptural expressions are made use of in close succession :

- "The idealists who walk by faith and not by sight." (2 Cor. v. 7.)
- "Many be called, but few chosen, said Christ." (Matt. xx. 16.)
- "Of the hosts that cry, Lord! Lord!" (Matt. vii. 21.)
- "Few have that earnest expectation of the creature." (Rom. viii. 19.)
- "To them it is given to know the mysteries." (Matt. xiii. 11.)
- "Not always the wise men after the flesh." (1 Cor. i. 26.)
- "Children of light." (1 Thess. v. 5.)

Dr. Osler alludes to Adam, to Cain, to Job, to Hezekiah, to Benjamin and the Levite, to Moloch, to the Witch of Endor, to Elijah and the Still Small Voice, to Gallio, to the Laodiceans, to Dives and Lazarus, and to the "Preacher" of Ecclesiastes.

The strongest proof, however, that the Bible has never lost its effect upon our literature is found in the works of the standard writers of English. Robert Louis Stevenson may fairly be taken as a representative modern author, and assuredly his style, especially in his *Essays*, derives much of its charm, much of its strength also, from the scriptural allusions in which it abounds. In the essay entitled "Old Mortality," for example, within the limit of one page and five lines Stevenson makes four distinct references to the Bible. First we have the Garden of Eden: "A man by his own fault ruined; shut out of the garden of his gifts (Gen. iii. 22, 23). The very next phrase would lose its meaning to a reader unacquainted with the ninth chapter of Judges: "His whole city of hope both ploughed and salted; silently awaiting the deliverer." The allusion is, of course, to Abimelech's capture of the city of Shechem, which he "beat down and sowed with salt" (Judges ix. 45). A few lines further on we are transported to the Book of Daniel: "But he held an inquest, and passed sentence: *mene mene*" (Dan. v. 26). The fourth allusion speaks for itself: "Thus was our old comrade, like Samson, careless in his days of strength; but on the coming of adversity, and when the strength was gone that had betrayed him — 'for our strength is weakness' — he began to blossom and bring forth." "Blossom and bring forth" — is not this, perhaps, a fifth scriptural allusion — to Isa. xxvii. 6? —

"Israel shall blossom and bud and fill the face of the world with fruit."

For complete demonstration of this influence of the Bible upon literature, no poem in the English language is more to the purpose than Robert Browning's *Christmas Eve and Easter Day*. *The Ring and the Book*, indeed, does, in some respects, furnish a more striking exemplification of the point. In that poem, the profusion of scriptural allusions seems the more remarkable from the fact that its subject is not closely allied with scriptural themes as is the case with *Christmas Eve and Easter Day*. Also, the great length of *The Ring and the Book*, and the variety of its movement, makes it possible for its quotations to extend over a much larger number of the sacred books. But *Christmas Eve and Easter Day* is more thoroughly imbued with the Bible; it is rooted and grounded in the Word of God. This poem of about two thousand five hundred lines contains one hundred and thirty scriptural allusions. If, in deference to his gentle reader's ignorance of the Bible, Browning had suppressed every line containing any reference to that "Old Book," he would have been obliged to expunge nearly four hundred lines, and to leave the rest unintelligible. Examine, for example, Stanza X. of *Christmas Eve*. Here lines 53-73 are almost continuously made up of scriptural allusions:

"The organ blatant
Holds his breath and grovels latent,
As if God's hushing finger grazed
him,
(Like Behemoth when he praised
him)
At the silver bell's shrill tinkling,
Quick cold drops of terror sprink-
ling
On the sudden pavement strewed
With faces of the multitude.
Earth breaks up, time drops away,
In flows heaven, with its new day
Of endless life, when he who trod,
Very man and very God,
This earth in weakness, shame and
pain,
Dying the death whose signs remain
Up yonder on the accursed tree—
Shall come again, no more to be

"This is the finger of God." (Ex. viii. 19.)

"Behold now behemoth, which I made with thee." (Job. xl. 15.)

"Looking for and hastening unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat. Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." (2 Peter iii. 12, 13.)

"Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree." (Acts v. 30.)

Of captivity the thrall,
But the one God, All in all,
King of kings, Lord of lords,
As his servant John received the
words,
'I died, and live forevermore.'

"When he ascended up on high,
he led captivity captive." (Eph. iv.
8.)

"But Christ is all, and in all."
(Col. iii. 11.)

"Who is the blessed and only Po-
tentate, the King of kings and Lord
of lords." (1 Tim. vi. 15.)

"I am he that liveth and was
dead; and behold, I am alive for
evermore, Amen." (Rev. i. 18.)

In these fourteen lines, Browning alludes to the Books of Exodus, Job, Acts, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Timothy, 2 Peter and Revelation, and, besides, makes a general reference to the whole life and death of Jesus Christ.

Again, in *Easter Day*, Stanza VIII., forty lines in length, is composed altogether of references to the Bible. A comparison of this remarkable passage with the parallel passages of Scripture may prove suggestive:

"You indeed opine
That the Eternal and Divine
Did, eighteen centuries ago,
In very truth. . . . Enough you
know
The all-stupendous tale—that Birth,
That Life, that Death! And all,
the earth
Shuddered at—all, the heavens
grew black
Rather than see; all nature's rack
And throe at dissolution's brink
Attested—all took place, you think,
Only to give our joys a zest,
And prove our sorrows for the best?
We differ, then! Were I, still pale
And heartstruck at the dreadful
tale,
Waiting to hear God's voice declare
What horror followed for my share,
As implicated in the deed,
Apart from other sins,—concede
That if he blacked out in a blot
My brief life's pleasantness, 'twere
not
So very disproportionate!

An allusion to the whole gospel
story.

"And the earth did quake, and
the rocks rent." (Matt. xxvii. 51.)

"And there was a darkness over
all the earth until the ninth hour.
And the sun was darkened." (Luke
xxiii. 44, 45.)

"Christ died for our sins accord-
ing to the scriptures." (1 Cor. xv.
3.)

Or there might be another fate—
I certainly could understand
(If fancies were the thing in hand)
How God might save, at that day's
price,

The impure in their impurities,
Give license formal and complete
To choose the fair and pick the
sweet.

But there be certain words, broad,
plain,

Uttered again and yet again,
Hard to mistake or overgloss—
Announcing this world's gain for
loss,

And bidding us reject the same:
The whole world lieth (they pro-
claim)

In wickedness—come out of it!
Turn a deaf ear, if you think fit,
But I who thrill through every
nerve

At thought of what 'deaf ears de-
serve—

How do you counsel in the case?"

"Shall we continue in sin that
grace may abound? God forbid.
. . . What then? shall we sin
because we are not under the law,
but under grace? God forbid."
(Rom. vi. 1, 15.)

"But what things were gain to
me, those I counted loss for Christ.
Yea doubtless, and I count all
things but loss for the excellency
of the knowledge of Christ Jesus
my Lord." (Phil. iii. 7, 8.)

"And the whole world lieth in
wickedness." (1 John v. 19.)

"Wherefore come out from among
them and be ye separate, saith the
Lord, and touch not the unclean
thing." (2 Cor. vi. 17.)

"For if they escaped not who re-
fused him that spake on earth,
much more shall not we escape, if
we turn away from him that speak-
eth from heaven." (Heb. xii. 25.)

In view of this dominant influence of the Bible upon one of
the greatest poems that the century just closed has produced, a
systematic study of the extent and character of that influence
could hardly fail to interest Bible scholars. But for the present
purpose, a few examples may suffice for illustration.

One of the most apt and beautiful scriptural allusions in
Christmas Eve is to the Transfiguration:

"Good were it to be ever here.
If thou wilt, let me build to thee
Service-tabernacles three,
Where, forever in thy presence,
In ecstasie acquiescence,
Far alike from thriftless learning
And ignorance's undiscerning,
I may worship and remain!"

And, again, in *Easter Day*:

"I still
Stand in the cloud, and, while it wraps
My face, ought not to speak perhaps."

Twice, in this poem, Browning alludes to the Pearl of Price, for the possession of which a man may wisely sell all that he hath (Matt. xiii. 46). First, in *Christmas Eve*:

"And how when the Critic had done his best,
And the pearl of price, at reason's test,
Lay dust and ashes levigable
On the Professor's lecture-table,—
When we looked for the inference and monition
That our faith, reduced to such condition,
Be swept forthwith to its natural dust-hole,—
He bids us, when we least expect it,
Take back our faith,—if it be not just whole,
Yet a pearl indeed, as his tests affect it."

And, again, in *Easter Day*:

"No misery could screen
The holders of the pearl of price
From Cæsar's envy."

Browning was especially conversant with the writings of the Apostle John. He apparently knew the First Epistle of John by heart, and he loved the Book of Revelation. As a sample of his many allusions to this book, take, from *Christmas Eve*, his description of St. Peter's at Rome:

"And what is this that rises propped
With pillars of prodigious girth?
Is it really on the earth,
This miraculous Dome of God?
Has the angel's measuring-rod
Which numbered cubits, gem from gem,
Twixt the gates of the New Jerusalem,
Meted it out—and what he meted,
Have the sons of men completed?" (Rev. xxi. 16-21.)

An excellent instance of Browning's vigorous, half-humorous, presentation of a thought is in *Easter Day*, Stanza VII.:

“What says history?
How comforting a point it were
To find some mummy-scrap declare
There lived a Moses! Better still,
Prove Jonah’s whale translatable
Into some quicksand of the seas,
Isle, cavern, rock, or what you please,
That faith might flap her wings and crow
From such an eminence!”

No more appropriate close could be found for these thoughts upon the permanence of the Bible’s influence than Browning’s allusion to Christ’s promise of his perpetual presence in the world (Matt. xviii. 20; Matt xxviii. 20):

“I remember, he did say
Doubtless that, to this world’s end,
Where two or three should meet and pray,
He would be in the midst, their friend.”