

A SERIES

OF

TRACTS

ON THE

DOCTRINES, ORDER, AND POLITY

OF THE

✓
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

IN THE

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

EMBRACING

SEVERAL ON PRACTICAL SUBJECTS.

VOL. VI.

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HOW TO USE THE BIBLE.



THE Bible is the profoundest book in the world. Other books contain the thoughts of men; this is full of the thoughts of God. It informs us of the nature, will, and government of God; it treats of the nature, offices, and destiny of angels; it tells us when, where, how, and for what man was made; it informs us of the original and of the end of all things. Events that have occurred in the remotest antiquity, and events that shall occur in the latest futurity, are alike familiar to inspired men. Time, in its relations to an eternity past and to an eternity to come, all the loftiest themes of human thought, all the deepest mysteries of human guilt and divine mercy, things at once the most glorious and the most terrible, are discoursed of with reverent familiarity in the sacred volume.

Nor is the Bible less practical than it is profound. There is not a duty that it does not enjoin; not a sin that it does not forbid. It always favours truth and virtue. It makes perpetual war on sin and error. To obey it perfectly is to attain all the highest ends of existence. To disobey it in the least is to court shame and misery. It is thus above all other books useful. It is the revelation of the mind of God to man for his own eternal salvation, and for the everlasting glory of the Creator of heaven and earth.

“What saith the Scripture?” “How readest thou?” are therefore most pertinent and pregnant questions,

whenever religious doctrine or duty is concerned. All contempt of the word of God is therefore foolish, dangerous, and monstrous. "If they escaped not, who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven?" "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, it shall judge him in the last day." "He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God." "Wisdom is too high for a fool." "Fools die for want of wisdom." To abuse or even to neglect the Bible is to covet death. To slight it is to despise our own mercies.

TRANSLATIONS.

The lawfulness of translating the Scriptures into the languages spoken by the common people is generally conceded. The church of Rome, indeed, in all her missions to the heathen for two centuries past, is said not to have produced a single translation of God's word for the use of the people, who are perishing for lack of vision; yet even she admits the lawfulness of translations. The Vulgate in Latin, the Douay in English, and Martini's Bible in Italian, are all uninspired versions of holy writ. We have also the example of Christ and his apostles, who freely quoted the Septuagint, which was the Greek translation of the Scriptures in common use in their day. This example settles the question. Though in case of doubt the originals must be regarded as the very words of the Holy Ghost, yet the reason for making translations is as strong as for preaching in the language understood by the audience. Paul says: "I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue." When the Bible was given, it was given in languages well understood by those to whom it was addressed. When those languages are not generally understood, translations are necessary.

THE BIBLE CALLS FOR EXAMINATION.

For various reasons we are bound to examine the Scriptures. It is peculiarly pleasant to find the word of God itself so clear on this very point. The Bible is not an amulet. It works not as a charm. Nor was it intended merely to garnish a chamber or a parlour. By Moses God said: "These words, which I command thee this day shall be in thy heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thy house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thy hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thine house, and on thy gates." It is impossible to give any fair interpretation of this passage, which does not imply the duty of becoming well acquainted with the word of God. The ordinary method of doing this is by reading it, by hearing it, by thinking and speaking of it. David tells us what was his practice on this subject: "Thy word have I hid in mine heart;" "I will delight myself in thy statutes;" "I will not forget thy word." Jeremiah says: "Thy words were found and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of my heart." When Jesus Christ came, he gave a clear and plain command on the subject: "Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me." To the Colossians Paul says: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom." Shall God speak, and man not hear? Shall he reveal his will, and we not study to know it? "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." "The prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the

Holy Ghost." "We thank God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God, which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but (as it is in truth) the word of God." The Bible is God's word to man. He has commanded us to search it. We are guilty if we obey not. Our right to do so who shall challenge? "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed, belong unto us, and to our children."

THE FATHERS.

Nor did pious men within the first five centuries of the apostles vary in their testimony on this subject. They all held and taught that it was the right and the duty of the people to read and judge for themselves. It is refreshing to one's spirit to find how eagerly they studied God's word, and by all proper means encouraged others to do the same. Chrysostom says: "Is it not absurd, that, in money matters, men will not trust to others, but the counters are produced, and the sum cast up; yet, in their soul's affairs, men are led and drawn away by the opinions of others, and this when they have an exact scale and an exact rule, viz: the declaration of the divine laws? Therefore, I entreat and beseech you all, that, not minding what this or that man may say about these things, you would consult the holy Scriptures concerning them."

The emperor Constantine, before the Council of Nice, knew that he was appealing to the common mind of the fathers assembled, when he said: "The books of the evangelists and apostles, and the prophetic oracles, plainly inform us what opinions and sentiments to entertain concerning God; therefore, laying aside all unfriendly contention, let us proceed to debate and prove the things in question from the sacred writings."

Jerome said: "Love the Scriptures, and wisdom will love thee." Both of himself and another of the fathers it is related, that when they sat at their tables, and when they lay down to sleep, they had God's word

read to them. Tertullian says; "I adore the fulness of Scripture; I do not admit what thou bringest in of thine own without Scripture." Theodoret says: "Do not offer reasons and arguments that are human, and drawn from the authority of men. I believe and obey only the holy Scripture."

Basil says: "Let the divinely inspired Scripture determine the whole controversy among us." Justin Martyr says: "We must know, by all means, that it is not lawful or possible to learn anything of God, or of right piety, save out of the prophets, who teach us by divine inspiration." Augustine says: "Take and read the Scriptures, for whatsoever is in them is high and divine: there is verily truth, and a doctrine most fit for the refreshment and renewing of men's minds, and truly so tempered that every one may draw with a devout and pious mind, as true religion requires."

So full and uniform is the testimony of the fathers on the general obligation to study God's written word, that Fenelon, in his celebrated letter to the Bishop of Arras, "On the Reading of the Holy Scriptures in the vernacular," speaks as follows: "I think that in our days persons have taken useless trouble to prove what is incontestable, to wit, that during the primitive ages of the church, lay-persons were accustomed to read the holy Scriptures. To be convinced of this, we have only to open the works of St. Chrysostom. He says, for example, in his preface to the Epistle to the Romans, that he *feels a lively sorrow*, because many of the faithful do not understand St. Paul, *as they should*, and because this ignorance in some is so great that they do not *even know the number of his epistles*. He adds, that this disorder proceeds from the fact *that they are unwilling to have his writings in their hands assiduously*; he further declares, that ignorance of the holy Scriptures *is the source of the contagion of heresies, and of the neglect in morals*. "Those," he says, "who do not turn their eyes toward the light of the Scriptures, fall necessarily into errors, and into

frequent faults." "The whole of this discourse," continues Fenelon, "regarded the lay-persons, who were accustomed to hear the sermons of this father." St. Jerome, speaking to Læta concerning the education of her granddaughter, says that when this child shall commence to be a little older, her parents must find her only in the sanctuary of the Scriptures, consulting the prophets and apostles, concerning the spiritual nuptials. He adds: "Let her every day bring to you her work in order, which shall be a bouquet of the flowers of Scripture; let her learn the number of the Greek verses, and afterwards let her be instructed in the Latin edition." He desires that this young maiden should love the holy books instead of jewelry and silken stuffs. . . . Let her learn the Psalms Let her instruct herself in the proverbs of Solomon on the rule of life; let her, in Ecclesiastes, accustom herself to trample worldly things under foot; in the book of Job, let her follow the examples of courage and patience; let her pass to the gospels, never to put them out of her hands; let her with an ardent thirst be filled with the acts of the apostles, and with their epistles. . . . Let her learn by heart the prophets, the first seven books of Scripture, those of Kings," &c. This testimony of the archbishop of Cambray is the more remarkable, as it is the first part of a letter, the object of which is to justify the church of Rome in withholding God's word from the people. To every well-ordered mind these concessions must be fatal to the main purpose. In a subsequent part of the same letter he says: "Besides, in those times all the Scriptures, and even all the liturgy, were in the vernacular language. All the West understood the Latin, in which was the ancient version of the Bible, called by St. Augustine the *old Italian version*. The West also had the liturgy in the same language, which was the language of the people. At the East it was the same thing: the people there all spoke Greek; they understood the Septuagint version, and the Greek liturgy, just as our

people understand the French translation. Thus, without entering upon any question of criticism, it is clearer than day that the people had in their natural language the Bible and liturgy, which they caused their children to read, that they might be properly educated; that the holy pastors, in their sermons afterwards explained to them the whole Scriptures; that the text was very familiar to the people; that they were exhorted to read it continually; that they were reproached for neglecting to read it; finally, that such neglect was regarded as the source of heresies, and of the relaxation of morals. This is something which no one need undertake to prove, because it is evident in the monuments of antiquity." Truly Fenelon is a good witness for us. Would that he had always spoken as truly as in what has been quoted.

GREAT STUDENTS OF THE BIBLE.

That we may see what can be done in becoming acquainted with the Bible, and that we may be awakened to imitate so good examples, let us look at a few facts. Eusebius tells us of one who had his eyes burnt out in the Dioclesian persecution, and who repeated, in a public assembly, the very words of Scripture, with as much accuracy as if he had been reading them. Jerome says of Nepotian, that by reading and meditation he had made his soul a library of Christ. Theodosius, the younger, was so familiar with the word of God, that he made it a subject of conversation with the old bishops, as if he had been one of them. Augustine says, that after his conversion, he ceased to relish even Cicero, his former favourite author, and that the Scriptures were his pure delight. Tertullian spent a great part of his time in reading the Scriptures, and committed large portions of them to memory. In his youth, Beza learned all Paul's epistles in Greek so thoroughly, that when he was eighty years old he could repeat them in that language. Cranmer is said to have been able to repeat the whole of the New Tes-

tament from memory. Luther was one of the most indefatigable students of the Bible that the world has ever seen. Ridley said: "The wall and trees of my orchard, could they speak, would bear witness that there I learned by heart almost all the epistles; of which study, although in time a greater part was lost, yet the sweet savour thereof I trust I shall carry with me to heaven." Sir John Hartop, a man of many cares, made the book of God so much his study, that it lay before him night and day. A French nobleman used to read three chapters of the Bible every day, *on his bended knees, with his head uncovered*. Joshua Barnes is said to have read a small pocket Bible a hundred and twenty times over. Mr. Roger Cotton read the whole Bible through twelve times a year. The Rev. William Romaine studied nothing but the Bible for the last thirty or forty years of his life. John Boyse, one of the translators of our Bible, had read all the Scriptures before he was five years old. His mother read them through twelve times. Some have read the Bible through many times in a year. I have read of more than one, of whom it was said, that if the Bible had been lost, the whole might have been recovered from their memories. In short, was there ever an eminent Christian who was not remarkable for his study of Scripture, as he had opportunity?

STRIKING TESTIMONIES TO THE BIBLE.

The Bible does indeed contain aliment for feeble minds. Even little children may be made wise and good by its heavenly truths. But there is nothing more idle than the flippancy of some, who speak of the Scriptures as unsuited to strong minds. The mightiest intellects of modern times have paid profound homage to the sacred writings. Lord Bacon, the father of the only sound method of philosophising, says: "There never was found, in any age of the world, either religion, or law, or discipline, that did so highly exalt the public good, as the Christian faith." Sir Robert Boyle

says: "The Bible is a matchless volume. It is impossible we can study it too much, or esteem it too highly." Sir Isaac Newton says: "We account the Scriptures of God the sublimest philosophy." John Milton says: "There are no songs comparable to the songs of Zion." Locke says: "The gospel has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter." Selden says: "There is no book in the universe upon which we can rest our souls, in a dying moment, but the Bible." Similar testimonies might be almost indefinitely increased. Take this one additional. Byron spent his days in guilt and folly, but his conscience and his genius paid homage to Scripture. Not long before his death he wrote these lines on the blank leaf of a Bible:

" Within this awful volume lies
 The mystery of mysteries.
 \ Happiest they of human race,
 To whom their God has given grace
 To read, to hear, to hope, to pray,
 To lift the latch—to force the way;
 And better they had ne'er been born,
 Than read to doubt, or read to scorn."

At another time he said: "Indisputably the firm believers in the gospel have a great advantage over all others, for this simple reason, that, if it be true, they will have their reward hereafter; and if there be no hereafter, they can be but with the infidel, in his eternal sleep, having had the assistance of an exalted hope through life."

OUR ENGLISH VERSION.

Our English translation has some faults, but they are few compared with its excellencies. Its faults are generally known, and, when the marginal readings of the translators are given, the remaining blemishes are so few as hardly to call for serious notice in a popular

treatise. Above most translations, ours contains a complete transcript of the ideas of the original, preserves the style and manner of the original, and yet possesses the ease of original composition. Like Luther's Bible, it fixed the language into which the translation was made, and remains a classic to this day. The clamours of men, who call for a new translation, would be entitled to more respect, if they evinced either sound scholarship or a good temper. Let them, in a Christian spirit, and without private ends clearly in view, set forth their new translation, and the world will judge of it with candour. Let them bring all the sound learning possible to their work; let them be masters of the original and of the kindred languages; let them be skilled in all kindred branches of learning, and do their task as workmen, that need not be ashamed, and we will thank them. But when men cannot defend the cause of temperance, or argue on the morality of the institutions of the country, or defend the ordinances of religion, without attacking our English translation, it may generally be inferred that they have taken some position not supported by Scripture. Even in practical preaching, some weak men display an intolerable vanity in frequently criticising the text. The learning of the age, when our translation was made, was truly prodigious. It was far in advance of the present age, as its monuments amply testify. The translators were well chosen. Due respect was had to their learning, their piety, their sound judgment, and their age. "The average age of all of them, so far as ascertained, was considerably more than sixty years." They were not striplings, but brought great maturity of mind to their task. They have won more honour than any other men ever gained in any literary work. Take a few testimonies on the subject. Lowth said: "The vulgar translation of the Bible is the best standard of our language." Horsley said: "The adherence of the translators to the Hebrew idiom is supposed at once to have enriched and

adorned our language; and as they laboured for the general benefit of the learned and the unlearned, they avoided all words of Latin original, when they could find words in their own language, even with the aid of adverbs and prepositions, which would express their meaning." Dr. White, Regius Professor of Hebrew in the University of Oxford, said: "General fidelity to its original is hardly more its characteristic than sublimity itself. . . It is still considered the standard of our tongue. The English language acquired new dignity by it." Dr. Adam Clarke said: "The original, from which it is taken, is alone superior to the Bible translated by the authority of King James." Dr. James Beattie said: "It is a striking beauty in our English Bible, that though the language is always elegant and nervous, and for the most part very harmonious, the words are all plain and common; no affectation of learned terms, or of words of Greek and Latin etymology." Middleton said: "The style of our present version is incomparably superior to anything which might be expected from the finical and perverted taste of our own age. It is simple, it is harmonious, it is energetic; and, which is of no small importance, use has rendered it familiar, and time has rendered it sacred." John Taylor, of Norwich, said: "As our translation is in itself by far the most excellent book in our language, so it is a pure and plentiful fountain of divine knowledge, giving a true, clear, and full account of the divine dispensation, and of the gospel of our salvation, insomuch that whoever studies the Bible, the English Bible, is sure of gaining that knowledge and faith, which, if duly applied to the heart and conversation, will infallibly guide him to eternal life." Our own countryman, Fisher Ames, said: "In no book is there so good English, so pure and so elegant. . . The Bible will justly remain the standard of language as well as of faith." These testimonies, with many others that have been published to the world, are a solemn and sufficient reproof to those sciolists

and agitators who, on every occasion when their vanity, or extravagance, or bigotry, are rebuked, cry out against our English translation as unworthy of reliance.

THE RIGHT SPIRIT.

In all matters the spirit that actuates men has been felt and acknowledged to be important. It is so in learning any art or science. In studying God's word, the importance of a right spirit cannot be over-estimated. The want of it produces more miscarriages than all other causes united. Some minds are so full of prejudices that their progress in divine knowledge is painfully slow. Nothing is more opposed to docility, or to our advancement in learning, than a state of mind forearmed against the truth. Impartiality is difficult of attainment, but is essential to success. Prejudices sometimes lie against particular doctrines of the Bible, and men come to God's word, not to find out what it teaches, but to discover some means of getting rid of unwelcome truths. Anything favouring their errors is seized with avidity, but anything warring on their preconceived opinions is carefully avoided. The truth is, that "the carnal mind is enmity against God," against all his nature, all his will, all his word, so that "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." How many who give some signs of seriousness, yet reject or slight parts of Scripture, as Solomon's Song, Hosea, or the Epistles of Paul! The very books they fail to study contain, perhaps, the best correctives of their faults of character. Some profess little regard for the Old Testament, calling it the "old law," and at the same time would persuade us that they had a wonderful regard for the New Testament. But "the two Testaments, like the two cherubim, look stedfastly towards each other, and towards the mercy-seat, which they encompass." Whoever neglects the Old Testament must have very disjointed views of

truth; must be in darkness on some very important subjects; must be ready to follow many wild opinions on vital points of doctrine, and embrace a system destitute of all good proportions. If the Old Testament is not true, neither is the New. If the types of the former were not given by God, the antitypes of the latter are fallacious. He who rejects the Old Testament is already more than half an infidel, and will soon be wholly so, unless capable of some happy inconsistency of character. "The Scripture is so penned that they who have a mind to know, may know; they who have a mind to wrangle, may take occasion enough of offence, and justly perish by the rebellion of their own minds; for God never intended to satisfy men of stubborn and perverse spirits." Read the whole Scripture; read it with candour.

MAKE DILIGENT SEARCH.

"The book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth: but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success." The Bereans are commended for searching the Scriptures DAILY. The great law of acquisition in knowledge, as indeed, to a great extent, of wealth also, is "a little at a time, and often repeated." "The hand of the diligent maketh rich." He, whose mind dwells on divine truth, shall abound in the knowledge of God.

REVERENCE.

There is no more important qualification of a student of God's word than profound reverence for sacred things. To every one who opens the lids of this matchless, awful volume, God says: "Put off thy shoes from off thy feet; for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground;" "Sanctify the Lord of hosts himself, and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread;" "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and

of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word." Lightness of mind in any man shows a heart wholly unprepared to profit by the sacred volume. Irreverence in such study is profanity. The only way in which God's truth profits triflers is by first curing their levity, and then making them wise. Of all dispositions unfriendly to the successful study of divine truth, none is more prominent than a fondness for jesting with sacred things. Luther said: "Whom God would destroy, he first permits to sport with Scripture."

"Read and *revere* the sacred page—a page,
Which not the whole *creation* could produce,
Which not the *conflagration* shall destroy."

PRAYER.

As man's intellectual dependence on God is absolute, nothing is more proper in every student of the Bible than hearty prayer. A prayerless student of God's word never attained the wisdom of the just, never became wise unto salvation, never became mighty in the Scriptures. On the other hand, he who never opened the sacred volume but with earnest crying to God for divine illumination, never died a fool. No act that man can perform is more reasonable than offering such petitions as these: "Teach me thy statutes;" "Open thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law;" "Give me understanding;" "Incline my heart unto thy testimonies." If man ever needs help from on high, it is when endeavouring to learn the will of God for his own salvation. One of the most successful students of the Bible during the last century tells us how he perused the blessed volume: "I spread the Hebrew Bible before God, and cried to the Father, that, for the sake of his Son, he would by the Spirit shine on it, unto me, give light into, and discover his mind in the word; that he would give me life, health, strength, time and inclination to the study, and a blessing thereon; that he

would teach me how to manage that work, and would pity me as to sleep, having been somewhat bereaved of sleep since I was determined to that work." "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth liberally, and upbraideth not."

MODESTY.

Such are the weakness and limits of the human mind, and such is the sublimity of the matters brought to our notice in the Scriptures, that nothing is more reasonable than unaffected modesty in every student of the Bible. The profoundest scholars in every branch of knowledge have been the brightest patterns of ingenuous self-distrust. "I seem," said Sir Isaac Newton, after his great discoveries had been made, "I seem to be walking on the shore of a boundless ocean, and only to have picked up a few pebbles." The words of Milton, at the opening of his great poem, have often been quoted as evincing the same unfeigned sense of weakness:

"And chiefly thou, O Spirit, that dost prefer
Before all temples the upright heart and pure,
Instruct me, for thou know'st
. . . what in me is dark
Illumine; what is low, raise and support."

Nor are the Scriptures silent on so necessary a matter. "Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? There is more hope of a fool than of him." Our Lord chiefly refers to this low estimate of ourselves, when he says: "Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, shall in no wise enter therein." Such subjects as God's nature, counsels and government; as man's dependence and freedom, his obligations and destiny; such themes as time and eternity, life and death, sin and holiness, heaven and hell, are not to be justly understood by the proud and self-sufficient.

FAITH.

One of the most essential qualifications of a Bible student is true faith, an unfaltering reliance on the testimony of God, as true and sure to be accomplished. "We walk by faith." In proportion as any human character has shone illustriously, it has been remarkable for freedom from blind credulity and from carping scepticism. There never was a truly great mind that believed without evidence, or refused to believe upon sufficient evidence. In the Bible the God who cannot lie testifies, and every wise man believes what he says, even if he cannot see the reason of all things, yea, if some things seem contrary to his past judgments of them. When Luther was at Coburg, he wrote to a friend: "I was lately looking out of my window at night, and I saw the stars in the heavens, and God's great, beautiful arch over my head, but I could not see any pillars on which the great Builder had fixed this arch; and yet the heavens fell not, and the great arch stood firmly. There are some who are always feeling for the pillars, and longing to touch them; and because they cannot touch them, they stand trembling and fearing lest the heavens should fall. If they could only grasp the pillars, then the heavens would stand fast. Just so, many seem full of doubt, forgetting that the Scripture must be all fulfilled." If you come to search the Scriptures, "have faith in God."

THE LOVE OF TRUTH.

Of all the dispositions requisite to the profitable study of Scripture, none is more important than a sincere, constant, and ardent love of the truth. Indeed it is the foremost of all qualifications. He who loves his own opinions, or those of his sect or party, more than the truth of God, is a candidate for shame. Without this love of truth no man has ever made any considerable progress in knowledge. It is indispensable. Nothing can compensate for the want of it. It has

been a prominent trait of every good man's character. Job says: "I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food." David says: "My soul breaketh for the longing it hath unto thy commandments at all times;" "How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth;" "I love thy commandments above gold, yea, above fine gold." Solomon says: "If thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; if thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God." Peter says: "As new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby." This love of truth is God's sure pledge of guidance and enlargement in the knowledge of his will. He who has it, will "receive the engrafted word with meekness."

MEDITATION.

It is very important that we reflect much on God's word. Reading and hearing are sowing the seed; meditation is harrowing it in. The psalmist says: "I will meditate in thy precepts;" "O how I love thy law! It is my meditation all the day;" "Mine eyes prevent the night-watches, that I might meditate in thy word." Such a student of the Bible will not fail to make progress. "Meditation, to the book of revelation, is like the microscope to the book of nature; it is sure to discover new beauties." It is much to be regretted that some readers of Scripture so seldom give themselves time to reflect on what they have read. They derive not half the profit from Scripture that they would by a different course.

THINK FOR YOURSELF.

Nothing that has been said was intended to impair independence of thought and freedom of inquiry. Let every man do his own thinking. Let him settle first principles cautiously, and hold them firmly. David

says: "I have stuck unto thy testimonies." He could not in stronger terms have expressed his firm adherence to known truths. An inspired apostle says: "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good." The Bible inculcates humility, but not servility of mind. Lord Bacon well says: "Disciples do owe unto masters only a temporary belief, and a suspension of their own judgments till they be fully instructed, and not an absolute resignation, or perpetual captivity." Let every thought and imagination be brought into captivity to Christ; but call no man master. Think for yourself.

PRACTISE WHAT YOU KNOW.

The Scriptures are designed, not to fill the mind with notions, but for practical purposes. The word of God should regulate our thoughts and affections, our speech and behaviour. Thus David says: "Then shall I not be ashamed when I have respect unto all thy commandments;" "I will keep thy statutes;" "A young man shall cleanse his way by taking heed thereto according to thy word;" "I will keep the commandments of my God." Christ said: "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God." James says: "Be ye doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any man be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed." Practice makes sure our knowledge in a way that nothing else does. It is so in the exact sciences, in the useful and ornamental arts; above all it is so in religious truth. Practice is the very life of piety, the very end of divine teachings.

HELPS IN UNDERSTANDING SCRIPTURE.

In learning the will of God, it is proper to avail ourselves of all the aid we can get. Indeed we are bound to do so. Let, then, diligent use be made of the common English Bible. One of the great wants of our time is that of a thorough acquaintance, in teachers and in the taught, with the general statements of Scripture. This volume is, or ought to be, always near us. We should be familiar with its "songs and history, ethics and biography, scenes from the hearth, and episodes from national annals. . . . It tells of expeditions prior to Jason and the Argonauts. It describes martial adventures long before Achilles and Troy. Its ethical system preceded Thales and Pythagoras. Its muse was vocal before Orpheus and Hesiod. Its judges flourished before consuls and archons. Its feasts and gatherings rejoiced the tribes when the Nemean games had no existence; and it reckoned by Sabbaths and jubilees when neither Olympiad nor lustrum divided the calendar. It embodies the wish of the Athenian sage, for it 'scatters that darkness which covers our souls, and tells us how to distinguish good from evil.' By its light thousands have been led to reflection, to repentance, to wisdom, to Christ, to God, to heaven. Read, read, read your English Bible. Its epic and lyric poetry, its narratives and parables, its precepts and appeals, are incomparable, and its doctrines are heavenly truth. Dr. Chalmers says: "Many a cottage patriarch, with no other medium than his mother tongue, becomes a greater proficient in the wisdom and doctrines of the Bible, than the most accomplished linguist or grammarian."

HEBREW AND GREEK.

But let no man despise the originals. If he can read the Hebrew and Greek, or either of them, let him do it; a portion of his time could not be better spent.

How can it be accounted for that so few educated men ever turn their knowledge of Greek to the good account of gaining a better knowledge of the New Testament? If any have become rusty in their knowledge of Greek, a small portion of time every day devoted to it, will soon bring back all they ever knew of it. Laymen ought not to feel absolved from obligation to study the originals, if they are able to do so. By such studies they may render special services to religion. Luther well said: "We shall never be able to retain among us the pure gospel, unless we cultivate a knowledge of the original languages of Scripture." People ought, therefore, to encourage learning in all their religious teachers. The closing paragraph in the autobiography of Thomas Boston reads thus: "Upon the whole, I bless my God in Jesus Christ, that ever he made me a Christian, and took an early dealing with my soul; that ever he made me a minister of the gospel, and gave me some insight into the doctrine of his grace; and that ever he gave me the blessed Bible, and brought me acquainted with the originals, and especially with the Hebrew text. The world hath all along been a stepdame to me; and wheresoever I have attempted to nestle in it, there was a thorn of uneasiness laid for me. Man is born crying, lives complaining, and dies disappointed from that quarter. All is vanity and vexation of spirit. 'I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord.'"

A FRIEND MAY AID US.

We may often obtain much assistance, in understanding the Scriptures, from a friend, although he may not be superior to ourselves in many other things. Naaman, the Syrian, gained very important information from a little captive maid, even when the king of her own country could not have given it. The Ethiopian eunuch was greatly assisted in understanding the prophet Isaiah by Philip, the evangelist. From Aquila and Priscilla, Apollos learned the way of God "more

perfectly" than he had learned it before. Be not ashamed to learn from any man. Compare his views with Scripture, and, if sound, thankfully embrace them.

REFERENCE BIBLES.

One of the most important helps to the knowledge of God's word is a good reference Bible. We are thus able without difficulty to compare Scripture with Scripture. The man who of all others in the last generation, probably made the greatest proficiency in a knowledge of the Scriptures, has said: "Along with other means, consulting well selected marginal references, forms one of the best helps for fixing the word of God in the memory; leading the mind to a just interpretation of it, and, in many cases, rendering it most affecting to the heart. It tends powerfully to counteract all sceptical doubts, when every part of Scripture is thus found (like the stones in an arch) to support and receive support from the rest. It serves also to satisfy the mind as to the meaning of disputed passages, when one sense is found manifestly to accord with the rest of the sacred word, and other interpretations evidently run counter to them." In these thoughts many will recognize the serious and judicious style of Dr. Thomas Scott. Bishop Horsley also says: "Particular diligence should be used in comparing the parallel texts of the Old and New Testaments. It is incredible to any one who has not made the experiment, what a proficiency may be made in that knowledge which maketh wise unto salvation, by studying the Scriptures in this manner, without any other commentary or exposition than what the different parts of the sacred volume furnish for each other. Let the most illiterate Christian study them in this manner, and let him never cease to pray for the illumination of that Spirit by which these books were dictated, and the whole compass of abstruse philosophy and recondite history, shall furnish no argument with which the perverse will of man shall be able to shake this learned Christian's faith."

CONCORDANCES.

“A concordance is an index to the Bible, wherein all the words used through the inspired writings are arranged alphabetically, and the various places where they occur are referred to, to assist us in finding out passages, and comparing the several significations of the same word. A work of this kind, which tends so much to render the study of the holy Scriptures more easy to all Christians, must be acknowledged to be very useful; for if a good index to any other book is to be valued, much more ought one to the Bible, which is a revelation from God, given as the only rule of our faith and practice, to discover to us the way to eternal life through Jesus Christ.” Besides the use commonly made of the concordance, it often furnishes admirable facilities for finding out all the Bible says on a given subject, or at least so much of it as may be necessary for a comprehensive view. Let any man read all the texts given in the best concordances, under these words and their cognates, viz. : prayer, praise, humility, fear, hope, faith, love, patience, and many others, and he will have a fund of knowledge on these subjects which he will find of great use. Many of the best sermons may be composed in this way. In English, Brown’s concordance is too brief to be of much service; Butterworth’s has been mutilated and greatly injured; Cruden’s is by far the best.

COMMENTARIES.

Commentaries are also very useful helps, some of them very much so. Among commentaries on the whole Bible, you will find none better than those of Scott and Henry. Though the latter did not live to complete his work, yet he left some notes on the last part of Scripture, which several friends filled up. Henry is remarkable for sprightliness, ingenuity, and the practical application of divine truth. His commentary contains by far the best collection of striking sayings in our language. On the historical parts of

the Scripture, and on the parables, he is admirable. His early acquaintance with law enabled him to draw many useful illustrations from that noble science. Dr. Scott is remarkable for gravity, clearness and judiciousness. Like Henry, he is thoroughly evangelical. Into the hands of one asking what commentary I would recommend, I have often put a volume of each of these authors, and told him to judge for himself. The result has been that about as many have chosen one as the other. The commentary of Dr. Gill, though voluminous, and to some extent a translation of Poole, is not esteemed as much as it deserves to be. The commentary of Dr. Clarke is learned, but is often fanciful, and sometimes very unsound in doctrine. On the New Testament it is pleasing to see that the public still highly values Doddridge's Exposition. The expositions of particular books of Scripture are too numerous to mention. Many of them are worthless, and some of them are of the highest value. Of all these, my favourite is Leighton's Practical Commentary on the First Epistle of Peter. It is sufficiently learned, and has the sweetest savour of piety throughout. No good man can read it without finding his resolutions to lead a holy life greatly strengthened; and no bad man will be apt to read it through, for its appeals to the conscience are so pungent, that any one not utterly stupid will either cease to read it attentively, or fall under deep conviction of sin.

ANTIQUITIES.

It is a great help to the right understanding of God's word to have an acquaintance with the geography, manners, customs, laws and history, of the countries and people mentioned in the Bible. The facilities for obtaining this kind of knowledge are so numerous, that it is not necessary to name particular works. The truth is, all sound knowledge expands the mind, and is useful. Any science, truly so called, may furnish illustrations of Scripture that will give them vividness in our minds, and fix them in our memory.

GOOD DEFINITIONS.

A good definition is a rare thing, and yet it should be sought, in every science, at as early a stage as possible. Such definitions are often found in catechisms. They abound in the Larger and Shorter Catechisms of the Westminster Assembly. Any solid objection to catechetical instruction must lie against the particular book used. Any objection urged against this mode of instruction, lies with equal force against all our schools of every grade, for all of them that are valuable do much practise catechizing as a mode of instruction. Of the utility of catechisms in teaching divine truth, the world has had ample proof. Archbishop Tillotson says he thinks it a true observation, "That catechizing, and the history of the martyrs, have been the two main pillars of the Protestant religion." Milk for babes, and strong meat for men, is the Bible rule. He who has in his mind no definition of God, of his attributes, or great works of creation and providence, of sin, of justification, of sanctification, &c., will be comparatively ill prepared to make solid or systematic attainments in divine knowledge.

ADVANTAGES OF STUDYING THE BIBLE.

The Scriptures not only enjoin the study of the sacred volume, but they give us weighty reasons for doing so. The highest reason for any act is that it is agreeable to the will of God. In this matter his command is clear and decisive. This binds the conscience of the regenerate. But there are good reasons for all God's commands, and sometimes, as in this case, he makes them known to us. To search the Scriptures is in many ways profitable.

The study of God's word greatly enlarges our minds, and gives them extended views on the most sublime and important subjects. However much one's mind is inclined to driveling, the evil disposition must to a great extent be counteracted by the serious study of God's word. Thus that gross ignorance, which is the shame of many, would be to a pleasing extent removed,

and, in lieu of it, the light of divine truth would shine abroad. The mind of man, under divine guidance, is capable of indefinite improvement. Who can set bounds to knowledge, when the immortal mind of man is the learner, God's word the text-book, and God's Spirit the teacher? "The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding to the simple." One who had bent his mind in this direction, has left us this delightful testimony: "Thou, through thy commandments, hast made me wiser than mine enemies: for they are ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts." The whole creation has no such store-houses of wisdom as the sacred volume. "Thy testimonies are wonderful." "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God." The Bible is the only sure safeguard against heresy, fanaticism, and all the wild disorders of mind and of society. "Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures," is the brief history of religious errorists of every age. Without this anchor, men will be driven about with every wind of doctrine. A taste for the word of God expels a taste for vain pursuits.

GOD'S WORD ABIDETH FOR EVER.

"For ever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven." Men and mountains, seas and systems may change, but the word of the Lord endureth for ever. "The Scripture cannot be broken." Its teachings are not yea and nay, but yea and amen. "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise." His counsels are of old, faithfulness and truth. Even "the word spoken by angels was stedfast." The covenant of his peace shall stand. "There hath not failed one word of all his good promise." No change of place, no lapse of time, no march of science, no reverse of fortune, no progress of revolution, can change one whit of all that God has spoken.

THE SCRIPTURES ARE MIGHTY.

The sayings of great and wise men have been useful, but what thoughts of mere men ever had such power as the word of God? "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes." "Is not my word like a fire? saith the Lord; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?" "The word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

THE BIBLE FOR THE AFFLICTED.

"Unless thy law had been my delights, I should then have perished in mine affliction," said one, and thousands have felt as much. "Remember thy word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope. This is my comfort in my affliction, for thy word hath quickened me." "Trouble and anguish have taken hold on me; yet thy commandments are my delights." Millions have had the same experience. One of the most mournful sights on earth is a human being overwhelmed in sorrow, yet leaning on no divine promise. To such all seasonable truth is strange. On the other hand earth presents no spectacle more full of the moral sublime, than that of a child of God in deep distress, yet embracing the promises, and staying himself on God.

IT HELPS THE TEMPTED.

One of the sorest kinds of affliction to a virtuous mind is temptation; nor is there any successful mode of repelling the assaults of the great adversary, but by replying, as did our Lord, "It is written, it is written, it is written." Accordingly Paul taught the Ephe-

sians to "take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." Such is the heavenly temper of this blade, that even devils cannot resist it. Therefore constancy in the Christian profession is not to be expected in those who are ignorant of God's word; for "knowledge shall be the stability of thy times." The great nourisher of good hopes and just principles in man is God's word; for "whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." When all men shall know what this meaneth, "man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God," then the tabernacle of God shall be with men, and his glory shall lighten the earth.

THE BIBLE SHOWS THE WAY OF SALVATION.

The crowning excellence of Scripture is that it teaches us the way of salvation. The gospel is called "the word of this salvation," and "the word of reconciliation." "Search the Scriptures," said Christ, "for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of me." Faith comes by hearing the word of God. The very highest end of existence is to glorify God in the salvation of the soul. He who is infallibly taught the true and only method of deliverance from sin, from guilt, and from misery, and the true method of obtaining pardon, acceptance, and purity, has learned at once the hardest and the sublimest lesson that God ever teaches to man. Salvation secured, a blissful eternity follows; the soul lost, all is lost. By holding up Jesus Christ as the way, the truth, and the life; by pointing us to the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world; by denying access to God in any other way than through atoning blood, and by assuring us of all blessings in the name of Jesus, the word of God removes an amount of uncertainty and perplexity, which otherwise must be our ruin. Nor is the Scripture a dead letter. It is life, and it is spirit. In the

hands of the Holy Ghost its energy is resistless. "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth;" "The commandment is a lamp, and the law is light;" "Every word of God is pure;" "Sanctify them through thy truth, thy word is truth;" "Concerning the works of men, by the word of thy lips have I kept myself from the paths of the destroyer;" "Moreover by them [thy commandments] is thy servant warned; and in keeping of them is great reward." Christ himself said: "My mother and my brethren are these, which hear the word of God and do it." Paul parting with the elders of Ephesus, could say no kinder thing than this: "And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified."

CONCLUSION.

We live in a remarkable age. In the 13th century, in England, two arches of London Bridge cost £25. At the same time a copy of the Bible, with a few explanatory notes, cost £30. Then the wages of a labourer, if found, amounted to but nine pence a week. How different our circumstances, and how vast our responsibilities! Having so great a treasure as God's word, we are bound both to study it and to scatter it abroad. If the Bible Society does not deserve our support, nothing does. Dr. Johnson has well said: "If obedience to the will of God be necessary to happiness, and knowledge of his will be necessary to obedience, I know not how he that withholds this knowledge, or delays it, can be said to love his neighbour as himself. He that voluntarily perpetuates ignorance, is guilty of all that ignorance produces; as to him that should extinguish the tapers of a light-house, might justly be imputed the calamities of shipwreck." "Hold forth the word of life." "Let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."