

# The Bible Student and Teacher

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## Notes Editorial and Critical

The Moody Bible Institute is planning for a special Summer Course this year to meet

*The Moody  
Institute*

the needs of pastors, evangelists, returned mission-

aries and public school teachers during their vacation season. The course will cover the English Bible, the art of preaching and teaching, Gospel music and the defence of Christianity against modern attacks. Dr. James M. Gray, the Dean, will be supported by the larger part of the faculty of the Institute, and several pastors and specialists of reputation selected from other institutions of the country.

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It is a great joy to know that the "Old Gospel" has not lost its power to save. Some time since a prominent young business man in a Western City sent us the following letter:

"I am a subscriber to your magazine, and thank God that there is a religious journal that will stand for the Old Gospel.

"I am enclosing a newspaper clipping, giving parts of the beliefs of our

*The "Old  
Gospel"*

new pastor. I say parts, because some of the statements he made, he

did not see fit to give to the press. Last Sunday, in a sermon on 'Reason in Religion', he said that thinking peo-

ple had tabooed the old idea of saving a soul, and that the only way to save a drunkard was to change his environment. Think I shall change mine, and get into a church where the 'Old Gospel' is preached.

"I thank God that men were preaching the 'Old Gospel', and not picking it to pieces, the night I, a drunken business man, with the best of environments, stumbled into Mell Trotter's Rescue Mission".

And here is a brief record, from one of the Michigan dailies, of an anniversary day (spent in good company) in the life of the man (who does not desire his name made public), who was transformed by the power of that "Old Gospel":

"On the third anniversary of his conversion in the Grand Rapids Rescue Mission, ———, a well-known contractor of this city, Friday evening gave a talk in the Grand Rapids Mission. Nearly 3,000 people listened to the story of his conversion. He wandered into the mission at Grand Rapids three years ago and was so impressed with what he heard there that he has been an active worker in mission affairs ever since. The other speaker of the evening at the meeting was Dr. Gray of the Moody Bible Institute".

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ister His creation as a Sovereign, or as an Engineer? Can we pray to Him, with any hope that He will answer? If all were pre-arranged, prayer would be preposterous. Fancy supplicating an engine to withhold a piston-stroke! But God does hear, does intervene, does overrule, does take events out of the operation of lower laws into a higher region now as of old, though the administration of His Omnipotence comes in a different way. He is a Father Who watches lovingly over His children. He is Almighty; and contemplating His visible works, we are led to admire that inexhaustible power which has not spent itself wholly upon what we see displayed in Nature, but has measureless possibilities of benediction for us all. We throw ourselves upon His goodness, secure in the knowledge that He can never fail us, because He can not deny Himself. And every prayer

He answers is a fresh proof to-day of miracle.

To conclude: Christians have the highest evidence for believing, not only in the abstract possibility of miracle; but in those miracles which center about the person of One Whose unique life is a manifest miracle of holiness, and Who claimed to be the final Revelation of the Father's wisdom, power and love. This Person is the Object of our worship, the Heart of our religion; and when men tell us complainingly of His utterances, that they are hard sayings, we, with St. Peter, turn to Him and say: "Lord, to whom can we go? Thou, Lord, born of the Virgin Mary, risen again on the third day, art our Lord and God: Thou alone hast the words of Eternal life; Thou art the Way, and the Truth and the Life!"

## "Sixty Years with the Bible": A Record of Drifting

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Every simple and sincere record of vital processes makes an irresistible appeal to human sympathy. It matters not whether it be a record of growth or of decay. Both growth and decay are human experiences; and the human heart responds with quick and profound interest to the portrayal of either. The history of the years of declining vitality commands our concern as fully as that of the years of waxing vitality. We draw no Osler-line at forty, beyond which we will follow a life-drama with only waning attention. A book like Dr. Clarke's, which registers for us the course of a fading faith is sure, therefore, to claim a widespread and deep, if somewhat melancholy, interest. Such a record is unfortunately no novelty, but takes its place in an unhappily large literature. Fifty years ago the writings of F. W. Newman were possibly the most outstanding examples of the class. Of late examples have been rapidly multiplied.

Only a few months ago we were all reading the sad account Mr. Gosse felt impelled to give us of how he drifted away from the somewhat narrow, indeed, but firm and lofty faith of his parents into a wider but less elevated freedom. Perhaps it is not wrong to conjecture that Mr. Gosse's volume may have been part of the impulse which has led Dr. Clarke to recount for us the mental processes through which he has passed in the gradual decay of his faith in the divine authority of the Christian Scriptures. At any rate, his winningly written book deserves a place by the side of Mr. Gosse's and arouses in the reader's mind much the same class of emotions.

It must not be supposed that Dr. Clarke thinks of his change of attitude towards the Bible as a process of decay. On the contrary, he proclaims it a process of emancipation. In declining from the faith of his fathers, the faith in which he was bred, in the divine origin and authority of the Bible, it has seemed to him only that fetters have fallen from his limbs and he

\*"Sixty Years with the Bible: A Record of Experience". By William Newton Clarke, 1909, 12mo., pp. 259. From a notice in *The Princeton Theological Review*, for January, 1910.

has stepped out into a large place. His hope is that in recording his experience of enlargement of spirit he may blaze out the path so that many will follow him. His purpose is not, then, purely one of recording. He is making of his experience a kind of propaganda. He wishes to present his drift as one "worthy of a child of God", and to commend it "to all his brothers in God's family" as a thing to be imitated. In losing the Bible he thinks he has found it.

This is no unusual contention. Mr. Gosse made it for his decline also. Indeed, it only represents the customary state of mind of those who have lightened the ship of their faith by throwing overboard all that they find difficult to apprehend or hard to conciliate with the habits of current thought. It is no doubt a great relief to feel no longer bound to believe what stands in the way of our comfortable satisfaction in the easy passage of our minds along the beaten road. "And let me tell you", writes Mr. R. A. Armstrong, who has rejected the divine Christ as Dr. Clarke has rejected the divine Bible (*The Place of Jesus in Modern Religion*, first essay)—"strange as it may appear—even paradoxical, perhaps—that just in proportion as the supernatural, the superhuman, has faded away out of my thought of Jesus, and he has become in my thought, simple, natural, unmiraculous, largely subject to heredity and environment like all of us, human in his hopes and fears, human in his efforts and no doubt his errors, human in his faith and trust, human in his disappointments and final seeming failure—so much the more my heart has clung to him, the more he has drawn my love and veneration, the more I have longed to be like him, the more I have trusted what he has to tell me of the Father and his love, the more he has become a real and living influence in my life, a power capable of touching me to holier mood and braver effort". Similarly, Dr. Clarke protests that the more the supernatural and superhuman has faded away out of his thought of the Bible, the more frankly he has recognized its human shortcomings and errors and even immoralities, the more inspiring it has become to him, the more precious, the more trusted as a vehicle of the revelation of God. The

change of view he has experienced, he vigorously asserts, was "necessary, was Christian, was beneficent". We fear that the illusion of elevation and enlargement expressed in such language is largely due to the greater comfort and freedom which is felt in the presence of Jesus or the Bible by those who are determined to go their own way, when they have persuaded themselves that Jesus or the Bible, as the case may be, has no right to exercise authority over their thought. The casting off of an authority may indeed bring a sense of release to those who chafe under its pressure: but if the authority cast off is rightful authority, it may be doubted whether it is real freedom which has been gained. The question of importance in any event is, not whether, when the obligations have been cast off, we feel blithe and free, but whether these are obligations which can rightly be cast off.

Dr. Clarke undertakes to set down the story of his change of attitude towards the Bible, from assured acceptance of it as a divinely authoritative book, trustworthy and final in all its deliverances, to free criticism of its contents with the result of rejection of large parts of them as untrue and even immoral and the utilization of the whole as scarcely more than an inspiration for our thought concerning divine things. The progress of this change of attitude he traces in considerable detail, and presents in a most readable and, we may add, affecting narrative. But the reader is impressed with the fact that no justification of it is given; or rather, to speak more precisely, that no justification is given of any of the stages of belief regarding the Scriptures which are described as succeeding one another. The progress of the change experienced is traced for us, the occasion of the emergence of its several stages is indicated, but no critical scrutiny of their propriety is attempted. So far as appears from the narrative, Dr. Clarke's original faith in the Scriptures as a divine book was purely traditional. He took it over from his parents and instructors and seems never to have made serious inquiry into the basis on which it rested. And his subsequent changes of attitude appear to have come to him similarly out of the atmosphere with

which he was surrounded. There is at least no trace in the narrative of his having at any point of his changing views paused to subject the basis on which they rested to searching examination. It is quite possible that the narrative does him injustice here: undertaking merely to trace the processes of his mental development, his plan may have excluded the attempt to justify the successive changes of view through which he passed; and the illusion may be thus created that these several changes were one and all made without rational grounding. Such an illusion (if it be an illusion) is certainly created; and the impression is left very strongly fixed in the reader's mind that Dr. Clarke began with the "orthodox" belief in the Scriptures and has ended with the "liberal" view of them, alike, without having given to the question, What really are the Scriptures? any thorough investigation on its own merits. In other words, the story which he has narrated to us is on the face of it the story of a simple drift with the current of thought. In the mirror of his receptive mind he has apparently just reflected the dominating opinions of the times. When men in general were "orthodox", he too was "orthodox". When "liberal" ideas came to prevail, he too became "liberal" in his view.

This impression is somewhat strengthened by the occurrence of occasional turns of phrase which seem quite startlingly to suggest that Dr. Clarke has only desultorily looked into the main questions at issue. Thus, for example—to adduce only a single instance—when he comes to speak of the Canon (p. 258), he remarks quite as if recounting a discovery: "Many years ago I became aware that if the Bible is to be recognized as absolutely authoritative, we must have a Canon that is settled by divine authority". That, however, one would have thought a commonplace, which the slightest serious investigation would have made clear to any student of the subject from the beginning. Certainly the principle of the Canon has always been held "by the defenders of high inspiration" to be Divine gift through the Apostles, the authoritative founders of the Church, and its authentication as truly divine has been constantly found by them in the "testimony of

the Holy Spirit in the heart". When Dr. Clarke expresses his wonder that "this point has been so persistently overlooked by the defenders of high inspiration", he only betrays that he has been very insufficiently informed as to the positions of the "defenders of high inspiration", and has persistently confused the subjectivism of the mediating theologians with their high supernaturalism.

One of the effects on the reader of the impression of mere drifting which Dr. Clarke's narrative conveys, is a feeling of the insecurity of his final position. This position is one of perfect freedom over against the Bible, but at the same time one which in some sense finds in the Bible the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. When defining his attitude as a theologian towards the Bible (p. 210), he says: "According to the principle that I accepted and acted upon, a system of Christian theology has God for its center, the spirit of Jesus for its organizing principle, and congenial truth from within the Bible and from without for its material". This is, of course, to make very little of the Bible in our theologizing. Not all its declarations are to be worked into our system and none of them have "the element of finality". Only such of them as are "congenial", that is, as are "congenial to the spirit of Jesus" as we conceive that spirit, are to be used by us; and these only along with any other notions which we may consider "congenial" to that spirit which we may think discernible outside the Bible. Thus the Bible is deprived of all uniqueness as a source of theology and as "authority" is set altogether aside. But, at least in Dr. Clarke's view, that "spirit of Jesus" which he makes the "organizing principle" of "Christian theology" is the gift of the Bible to us. He even declares (p. 253): "It is certain that the Bible gives us knowledge of Jesus, and that Jesus gives us knowledge of God, and that God as Jesus reveals him in [is?] the true light of life. Our sacred book is thus our guide to Jesus, to God, and to life divine". In so saying a certain uniqueness seems to be reserved to the Bible in its relation to our theologizing. We should be glad to think so; but we are constrained to add that we miss any solid grounding for even

such a uniqueness. Dr. Clarke assures his readers, no doubt, that the faith that the Bible gives us the knowledge of Jesus "has been established in long human experience. and can be trusted". But he leaves them in grave uncertainty what amount of knowledge of Jesus the Bible gives us, and what kind of Jesus we may confidently derive from it. Dr. Clarke has committed himself far too deeply to the "new critical views" of the Bible to be able simply to take off of the face of the Scripture as it stands the Jesus which lies open to view on it. And if he did, this Jesus by His whole attitude towards "the Scriptures" as truly as by His express declarations regarding them would compel him to retrace his steps and to accord to the Scriptures that plenary authority as a witness to fact and doctrine alike which he has discarded. But if he is not to take off from the face of Scripture the Jesus that lies openly there, what Jesus does the Bible give true "knowledge" of? The "liberal theologians" of the last generation, discarding John in favor of the Synoptists and the other Synoptists in favor of Mark, and discriminating in Mark between the tradition of which he is the bearer and the theology which he superinduced upon it, managed to find "knowledge" in the Bible of a Jesus who fairly reflected in his teaching their own liberal thought. Our twentieth-century "eschatologists", working in their own way on the Biblical text, find "knowledge" in the Bible of an "ecstatic Jesus", the fair representative of first century Judaistic fanaticism. Which Jesus is it, or what Jesus is it, that Dr. Clarke finds that his eminently untrustworthy Bible gives him "knowledge" of,—who in turn is to give us our knowledge of God that is to stand as our test of truth—in the Bible and out of it? Obviously our conception of Jesus will depend on the view we take of the Scriptures from which we derive that conception; and if we are now to turn around and make our view of the contents of Scripture depend on the conception of Jesus which we derive from our reconstructed Scriptures, we seem to be in danger of falling into a circular movement of thought which promises us no very obvious issue. It would seem that

we ought to find a starting point somewhere.

The fact appears to be that simple drifting scarcely offers us a safe guide for our theology or for our view of the Bible. We may follow Dr. Clarke's driftage with a profound interest and a deep sympathy. But the mere fact that he has drifted through these stages and feels comfortable and assured at the end of them, scarcely commends them to us as stages of opinion we should like ourselves to drift through or an issue at which we should ourselves like to arrive. We have an old-fashioned prejudice for reasoned views of truth; and we are in our hearts convinced that the Jesus which the Bible gives us is the Jesus of the orthodox faith, and that the Bible which this Jesus has given us is the Bible of the orthodox faith. We are not unaware of the difficulties which attend both convictions. But we never expect to attain convictions on any matters of importance which are not attended with difficulties. And we prefer to rest our convictions on their own proper evidence and to leave the difficulties to be dealt with in detail as occasion offers and opportunity serves. If we could be convinced of nothing which offered difficulties to our faith, we could scarcely believe in God, or Man, or Salvation. The hardest thing to believe about the Bible, to our thinking, is that it can be a different kind of a book from what Jesus and His Apostles declare it to be. And the most difficult task we can conceive any one setting himself is that of holding to the Jesus of the Bible and at the same time not holding to the Bible of Jesus. It is a task we may feel sure has never been accomplished. He who no longer holds to the Bible of Jesus—the word of which can not be broken—will be found on examination no longer to hold to the Jesus of the Bible. The new Bible he has constructed for himself gives him a new Jesus, and his whole system of truth, brought into harmony with what he considers the spirit of this new Jesus, is eccentric to the system of truth which is taught us by the real Bible which is placed in our hands by the real Jesus, to whom it bears consentient witness.