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THE BIBLICAL WORLD

CONTINUING

The Old and New Testament Student

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THERE is no more striking characteristic of today's religious life than the renaissance of interest in biblical study. Not alone in colleges where chairs of Christian Literature are being founded, nor in theological seminaries where Biblical Theology is supplementing Dogmatic Theology, but among people at large is this interest increasingly great. A special testimony to the truth of this statement is seen in the earnestness with which any proposal for systematic Bible study is received. In England, the United States, and Australia hundreds of students are grouped in guilds and institutes. The latest proposition is one which has the earnest support of Mr. Moody, and, under the impulse which he always gives to religious undertakings, there are being held in various cities mass meetings in which a "new method" of the study of the Bible is proposed and adopted by large numbers. If we are to judge from the five rules which the discoverer of this "new method" has laid down for his students, it proposes no short cut to a knowledge of the Scripture, but lays emphasis, first, upon the repeated reading of large portions of the Bible, and, second, upon "punctuating of every verse with a prayer."

So far as the first rule is concerned it is most admirable. There is no greater enemy to an intelligent knowledge of the Scriptures than the patchwork in which ordinary reading, and

especially so-called "Bible readings," too often result. A verse here and a verse there, brought together by some arbitrary or artificial principle of association, can never give a knowledge of the Bible and its teachings. To take a concordance and gather together passages containing the word "Come" is not warranted to give one any great knowledge of the Christian doctrine of grace. The book and not the verse is the proper unit in Bible study. It is just as true, also, that the Scriptures, like any other literary work of supreme merit, need not only be read generously if they are to be appreciated, but must also be read and re-read repeatedly. Who would be allowed to call himself a student of Shakespeare who had read a scene from Hamlet, and a scene from Othello, and these but once? If this new method of Bible study will lead men to that intimate acquaintance with biblical teaching which can come alone from repeated readings, its originator will deserve the heartiest thanks. For it cannot be overlooked that the change from the directions for an old-fashioned "Bible reading" to the rule to read the first eleven chapters of Genesis ten times in succession is certainly a long step toward a proper method in the study of God's Word.

And much is to be said in favor of the second rule. Though no one can interpret it to mean literally what it says, one intent of such a method is to bring the mind of the reader into closer sympathy with God, and thus to arrive at a proper stage of spiritual receptivity. So far this is indispensable. It cannot be too much emphasized that a merely intellectual, that is, a non-religious, study of the Scriptures is not only unfruitful, but unscientific. A man who studies, be it never so intently, the prophets simply to discover political history, or the Pentateuch solely in search for its constituent documents, will get very little understanding of Isaiah or Moses. Spiritual sympathy is indispensable for correct interpretation. As the Bible is intended to set forth religious truth, so must it be studied in a religious spirit. That which is born of the mere grammarian is grammar, and grammar

is but a tool for the hand of the man in whom lives a passion for divine truth. And such a passion breeds and is bred by prayer.

While we thus recognize the importance of a prayerful reading of the Scriptures, we are not entirely clear that the special form implied by other descriptions of this new method is the best one. Unless we greatly mistake, while the method does not explicitly aim at such a result, it is in danger of cultivating the demand for an immediately appreciable spiritual blessing. A man is to get not merely historical facts, but religious inspiration and truth and unction at each time of reading. Even if this be a misinterpretation of this particular method, it is certainly the essence of much advice given Christian people. The slow, imperceptible growth of Christian character is discredited, and men are urged to seek in its stead instantaneous transformations, or definite and even scheduled spiritual results. A certain number of minutes each day is assigned the devotional reading of the Scripture, and at its end the reader is instructed to feel disappointment if he has not received an appreciable blessing.

We are farthest possible from criticising the ambition to derive moral and religious development from the Bible. That is the thing above all others that Bible study is for, and no man can overestimate its worth, but any teacher knows that in the realm of study harvest does not follow so immediately upon seed time. The student of chemistry does not expect that his first or any reaction will immediately lead him into a new consciousness of a mastery of his science, nor does the student of history expect to get a correct knowledge of the laws of human development when he first begins the study of Greece. Each may find his enthusiasm growing; each may occasionally be startled into new appreciation of the truth he is unfolding, but neither is concerned continually with his enthusiasms or with his

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appreciation of the teachings of nature or history. Each knows that the more data he obtains the broader will be his outlook and the more intelligent his interest in his particular subject. But to seek at the end of any hour of study an answer to the question as to whether he were becoming a better chemist or a better historian would be to dissipate his energy and defeat his very ambitions.

So in the realm of Bible study. Often spiritual insight and uplift come immediately upon the reading of a passage.

*TO SEEK
IMMEDIATE
QUANTITATIVE
RESULTS, BOTH
UNNATURAL
AND DANGEROUS* There are times in men's lives when they are conscious of a most rapidly growing Christian experience, but such moments are generally retrospective. Men are convinced that they *have grown* rather than they *are growing*. He who constantly attempts to uproot his Christian experience in order to measure its growth makes his life miserable with his introspection. The kingdom of God is to be established and developed in accordance with natural laws. As the plant grows imperceptibly to fruition, so, in the words of Jesus, is the kingdom of God to grow secretly, one does not know how, and gradually; first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear. The leaven, though it leaven the whole lump, is not to accomplish its mission at once, and a long time elapses between the mustard seed, the smallest of all seeds, and the mustard plant, the greatest of all herbs. The kingdom of God, as Jesus told the Pharisees, does not come with observation. To disregard this law of nature is to endanger not only one's peace of mind, but the truth of Scripture. Spiritual teaching is often not to be obtained from a specific passage by any legitimate method of interpretation, for the reason that it contains none. The constant search for such teaching, coupled with the determination to extract a certain amount of spiritual food at all costs and within a given time, is bound to lead to a misuse of Scripture and a positive perversion of its teachings. Men will seek not what the writer meant, but what they want him to mean.

What then is the true method of biblical study for the student who is determined to get from it a real spiritual result?

*BIBLE STUDY
AND NORMAL
SPIRITUAL
GROWTH*

First, a man must study the Scriptures with the determination to appreciate as thoroughly as possible exactly what the author of the Scripture intended him to obtain. It is not for the interpreter to add to or subtract from this meaning. Second, the student must study in a sympathetic spirit, and this implies that he is to endeavor to put himself under divine influence by prayer. Third, having thus endeavored to get at the truth precisely as it is, and to bring one's self as nearly as possible to the author of all truth, one should have such confidence in that truth and in that author as to believe that spiritual growth is inevitable. As a man has confidence in the power of God as revealed in the outer world, so should he trust God as he is revealed in the laws of human nature. Divine truth will not return to its maker void of results. He who seeks to apprehend exactly the teachings of prophet or apostle or the Christ, and who is willing to incorporate in his conduct such truth as fast as it is revealed, need not be seeking for quantitative spiritual growth. Such a student is working, not only wisely, but scientifically, and such study can no more fail to produce spiritual character than the earth can fail to produce fruit when once the seed is planted in it.

THE editors of the *BIBLICAL WORLD* take pleasure in announcing that the customary special number of the magazine for December will be prepared especially with reference to boys and girls. With this end in view the *(1897) BIBLICAL WORLD* number will be profusely illustrated and contain articles which have been especially prepared for the younger members of the family and the Sunday school.

The following is a partial table of contents: The Boyhood of Joseph, Professor Chas. F. Kent, Brown University; The Boyhood of Moses, Professor Chas. P. Fagnani, Union Theological

Seminary; The Boyhood of David, Rev. Dr. O. P. Gifford, Buffalo, N. Y.; The Boyhood of Daniel, Hezekiah Butterworth, Boston, Mass.; The Boyhood of John the Baptist, Rev. Dr. Philip S. Moxom, Springfield, Mass.; Poem, Alice Sawtelle Randall, Ph.D., New Haven, Conn.; Child Life in the Orient, Miss Anna Jessup, Beirut, Syria; Children in Missionary Lands, Mrs. Lucy A. Waterbury, Secretary of the Women's Baptist Missionary Society, Boston, Mass.; Bethlehem, the City of the Child Jesus, Professor Shailer Mathews, the University of Chicago.

In addition to these leading articles the departments of the magazine will contain matter dealing especially with the life of Christ, as well as with the general topic of the number. No pains will be spared to make this number the equal, and, if possible, the superior of any of the Christmas numbers of the BIBLICAL WORLD.