

IS THE BIBLE THE WORD OF GOD?

by

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CHAPTER FOUR

IT PROVES TO BE

One of the proofs that the Bible is not “like any other book” is that it has done what no other book has ever done, or ever could do. In the “*Dialogues*” of Socrates, in the “*Republic*” of Plato, in the “*Analects*” of Confucius, in the “*Vedas*” of the Brahmins, in the “*Zend Avesta*” of the Parsees, and even in the “*Koran*,” there are the strains of a noble and powerful morality, yet these and other works of a like order must forever be sharply distinguished from what is Christian in three tremendous ways:

- In respect of the writers,
- In respect of the writings,
- In respect of the results.

These teachers may be grouped together, but the name of Christ must not appear in the list, not even at the top. The contrasts overwhelm the comparisons. They stand on one side, and he on the other, not so much in the way of ignorance and knowledge as by reason of their differing qualities of character. It has been truly and eloquently said,

“Socrates was great and noble and wise, and his death is one of the most moving scenes of ancient history; let us not breathe one word against that holy and high-souled sage, but the truth is dearer to us even than Socrates; and, when we think of Socrates conversing with Theodota, or feasting with Agathon, when we remember the mingled leniency and coarseness with which he spoke of the sins of Critias; when we recall his cold and almost impatient dismissal of his wife and children at his hour of approaching death, and then, with bowed head, think of Him who talked by the well-side with the woman of Samaria, or stood alone by that guilty adulteress as she sobbed upon the temple floor; or who, as he hung upon the cross between the thieves, chose out the tenderest hearted of his disciples, and, in the midst of his anguish, said to his mother, “Woman, behold thy son, then indeed, if our Spiritual sense be not utterly blunt and dead, we may see how infinite is the gulf which separates the teacher of Athens from the Son of God.”

This great gulf lies not only between these teachers and Christ, but also between the Christian writings and theirs, alike in themselves and in what they have accomplished and are able to accomplish.

In “*Seekers After God*” we read,

“The morality of Paganism was on its own confession, insufficient. It was tentative where Christianity was authoritative. It was dim and partial where Christianity is bright and complete; it was inadequate to rouse the sluggish carelessness of mankind where Christianity came with an impartial and awakening power; it gives only a rule where Christianity supplies a principle; and even where its teachings were absolutely identical with those of Scripture, it failed to ratify them with a sufficient sanction; it failed to announce them with the same powerful and contagious ardor; it failed to furnish any absolutely faultless and vivid example of their practice; it failed to inspire them with an irresistible motive; it failed to support them with a powerful comfort under the difficulties which were sure to be encountered in the aim after a consistent and holy life.”

In other words, Pagan morality was like gathered blossoms stuck in the careless garden of a child, looking lovely for a time, but because they had no root soon withering away. But over against this the Christian writings have proved themselves to be living, active, efficacious and self-renewing. The triumphs of the Bible are to be seen in differing forms and degrees in the soul, in society, and in the race. Let us, for Our present purpose, call two witnesses, the Individual and Christianity.

Regarding the former of these, we shall see that the individual bears a threefold witness to the Bible: first, to its saving and keeping virtue; second, to its compelling and enabling power; and third, to its inherent value and charm.

And, considering the latter of these two witnesses, we shall bring under rapid review the sources, progress, and influence of Christianity.

1. THE WITNESS OF THE INDIVIDUAL TO THE BIBLE.

Never can all that the Bible has done for the individual soul be put on record, so great is the volume of testimony, but a slight knowledge of its triumphs in this direction will suffice to prove that it is indeed the Word of God, “**quick [alive] and powerful.**”

To begin with, how abundant is the testimony borne to:

(1) The Saving and Keeping Virtue of the Bible.

As illustrative of this, let us take the witness of two men widely separated in time, diverse in temperament, and altogether distinct in their tasks; namely, Aurelius Augustine, A.D. 354-430, and Charles Haddon Spurgeon, A.D. 1834-1892.

These were separated from each other in time by 1400 years, the one exercising his unique ministry from Hippo on the north coast of Africa; the other from London, England; the one as a Christian writer and ecclesiastic, wielding an influence second only to that of the apostles, an influence which diffused itself throughout the whole of Western Christendom; and the other as a preacher of the Gospel ranking easily as one of the greatest the world has ever known. How came these men to be what they were and to do what they did? Let their stories briefly be told. Both these men had godly mothers who never ceased to pray for them, Spurgeon having the advantage of Augustine in that he had also a devout father.

Augustine in youth was wild and wicked, given over to licentious indulgences; but Spurgeon was from earliest days a good boy, with a deeply religious inclination. Both alike were painfully alive to the fact that they were sinners, and passed through a period, the one longer and the other shorter, of vain endeavor and search for life and peace. Both were brought to the knowledge of Christ by a single text of Scripture, instrumentally in Augustine's case by a voice, as of a boy or girl, I know not, chanting and oft repeating, "Take up and read; take up and read"; and in Spurgeon's case by the simple message of an unknown Primitive Methodist preacher; the one at Milan, and the other at Colchester.

These were the texts which wrought the mighty change:

"Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and in wantonness, not in strife and envying; but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh."

Augustine says: "No further would I read; nor needed I; for instantly at the end of this sentence, by a light as it were of serenity infused into my heart, all the darkness of doubt vanished away."

In Spurgeon's case the text was:

"Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is none else."

"Setting his eyes upon me as if he knew all my heart," says Spurgeon, "the preacher said, 'Young man, you are in trouble.' Well, I was, sure enough. Says he, 'You will never get out of it unless you look to Christ.' And then, lifting up his hands, he cried out, as only a Primitive Methodist could do, 'Look, look, look!' I saw at once the way of salvation. Oh, how I did leap for joy at that moment! I know not what else he said. I was so possessed with that one thought. I had been waiting to do fifty things, but when I heard this word, 'Look:' what a charming word it seemed to me! I looked until I could have almost looked my eyes away; and in heaven I will look on still in my joy unutterable."

To these testimonies to the saving power of the Gospel might be added countless thousands through all the ages, and such books as "*Broken Earthenware*" and "*Down in Water Street*" are evidence enough that the Word of God is as potent as ever to work the miracle of miracles.

It will not even be pretended that any book in the world, or all the books in the world put together, have wrought such vast and beneficent conversions – such deliverances from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God – as have been and are day by day being wrought by the voice of God speaking to us from the Holy Scriptures. Is not this single fact sufficient to prove their unique preciousness, their transcendent supremacy?

It is life-giving because it is alive, and it is alive because it is, as no other book is, the Word of God.

But beyond this there is unnumbered individual testimony to:

(2) *The Compelling and Enabling Power of the Bible.*

This witness is co-extensive with the history of the Church, and if we introduce two names at this point, it is only a selection at random as illustrative of the great throng before and after them who have found the Bible, in life and service, to be compelling and enabling.

Martin Luther (1483-1555) will readily be voted one of the outstanding personalities of Christian history. A miner's son, he rose to a place of power and eminence which makes his influence a thing felt to this day. Professor Walker of Yale speaks of him as "one of the few men of whom it may be said that the history of the world was profoundly altered by his work. Not a great scholar, an organizer, or a politician, he moved men by the power of a profound religious experience, resulting in unshakable trust in God, and in direct, immediate, and personal relation to Him, which brought a confident salvation, that left no room for the elaborate hierarchical and sacramental strictures of the Middle Ages."

What was it that made this Erfurt monk so mighty a power? We are told that as he ascended the Santa Scala staircase at Rome on his knees, and when but half-way up, there burst upon his soul, like the rush of an avalanche, the text, "**The just shall live by faith.**"

And thenceforth, in his own personal experience, the sum of the Gospel was the forgiveness of sins and absolute dependence on the Word of God. From that so sudden and complete a deliverance came the bright and blissful Reformation in which "the sweet odor of the returning Gospel of Christ has embalmed men's souls in the fragrancy of heaven," and emancipated millions from Egyptian darkness.

For our second witness to the compelling and enabling power of the Bible, we come down two and a half centuries, to David Livingstone. We turn from Europe to Africa, and from a great reformer to a world-famous traveler and missionary. Perhaps the most impressive testimony to this heroic soul is that of Henry M. Stanley. He said:

"In 1871 I went to Africa as prejudiced as the biggest atheist in London. But there came for me a long time for reflection. I was out there, away from a worldly world. I saw a solitary old man there, and asked 'Why on earth does he stop here? Is he cracked, or what? What is it that inspires him?' For months after we met I simply found myself listening to him, wondering at him, as he carried out all that was said in the Bible: '**Leave all that ye have and follow me.**' But little by little his sympathy became contagious. Seeing his piety, his gentleness, his zeal, his earnestness, and how quietly he did his duty, I was converted by him, though he had not tried to do it."

That heroic soul on May 4th, 1873, was found dead on his knees at Chitambos village of Ilala, on the south of Lake Bangweolo, and two faithful Africans, whom he had rescued from slavery, carried his body on their shoulders three hundred miles to Zanzibar, whence it was brought to England. He was buried at Westminster Abbey, amid the tears of the noble and the great. Truly, it was the love of Christ that constrained him, and his love of the Bible that enabled him; and as part result of his sacrificial service Africans have been given the Word of God in at least fourteen languages.

These examples of courage and sacrifice but reflect the story of a multitude.

The time would fail me to tell of those who endured rack and prison and flame and sword for the sake of Christ and his Word. Said Cyprian: "They stood safe, stronger than their conquerors; the beaten and lacerated members conquered the beating and lacerating hooks." Such was their tremendous spirit through that long period of legalized and almost unbroken persecution, which reached from Nero to Diocletian.

Ignatius, the venerable bishop of Antioch, was sent to Rome to be devoured of beasts, on the way writing seven of his epistles. Justin was scourged and beheaded because he refused to sacrifice to the gods. When the aged Polycarp was bidden, "Swear by Caesar's fortune and revile Christ," he replied, "Eighty and six years have I served him, and he never did me wrong; how then can I revile my King and my Saviour?" The infuriated crowd demanded that he should be burned.

"The demand was complied with, and the populace in their rage soon collected from the baths and workshops logs and faggots for the pile. The old man ungirded himself, laid aside his garments, and took his place in the midst of the fuel, and when they would have secured him with nails to the stake, said, "Let me remain as I am, for he that has enabled me to brave the fire will so strengthen me that, without your fastening me with nails, I shall, unmoved, endure its fierceness."

After he had offered a short but beautiful prayer, the fire was kindled, but a high wind drove the flames to one side, so that he was roasted rather than burned, and the executioner was ordered to dispatch him with a sword. On his striking him with it so great a quantity of blood flowed from the wound as to quench the flames, which were, however, resuscitated, in order to consume his lifeless body.

Glorious was the witness of men, young and old, but not less glorious was the confession of women of differing age and station.

Blandina, a servant girl, amid horrible torture held firmly by the testimony of the Gospel.

Perpetua, a youthful matron of gentle birth, clasping an infant to her breast, calmly withstood the tears and entreaties of her aged father. When the governor bade her, "Have pity on thy father's gray hairs, have pity on thy helpless child, offer sacrifices for the welfare of the Emperor," she answered, "That I cannot do."

"Art thou a Christian?" he asked. "Yes," she replied, "I am a Christian."

Felicitas, the female slave, after her trial was seized with the pangs of maternity. The jailor said to her, "If thy present sufferings are so great, what wilt thou do when thou art thrown to the wild beasts? This thou didst not consider when thou refusedst to sacrifice."

She answered, "I now suffer myself all that I suffer; but then there will be Another who will suffer for me, because I suffer for him."

So the lady and the slave went together to the amphitheater, and, before the stroke which ended their sufferings, exchanged the last kiss of Christian love.

Nor did loyalty to Christ and his Gospel die with the dying of these heroes. There has been an aristocracy of sufferers for the truth through all the centuries, such as the Lollards, the Reformers, the Puritans, the Pilgrim Fathers, and the Covenanters, and did occasion again require such testimony, without doubt it would be forthcoming.

The martyr-spirit is not dead, just because the Word of God has not lost its compelling and enabling power over the souls of men, and it is still true that the more a man makes of the Bible the more it will make of him.

The late Wm. Muir has truly said:

“It is the Bible that has been aback of all civilizing, evangelizing, and reviving movements. From it has come the inspiration which has sent out the most successful missionaries and evangelists to gather in the lost; and no evangelical agency can expect to prosper unless it keeps the Bible in the very forefront.”

“Whether we think,” he says, “of the great revival of heart religion which we call the Reformation, or of the Puritan Revival which kept the fire burning on the altar in our land when the Counter-Reformation was doing deadly work everywhere else; or of the Methodist Revival either in its earlier phases, when so many were won for Christ, or in its later phases, when the Primitives came to be such a blessing to the villages of England – we always find that the good work gathered round the Bible, and especially round the English Bible.

“It is through its pages that both preparation and call have come to those whom God has used most, alike in the homelands and in the regions beyond. Not otherwise can there be an adequate sense of human need or of the fullness of the divine preparation for it. Not otherwise can men see the corroding, corrupting power of sin in the light of the Cross. Not otherwise can those who discover something of the immensity of their debt to Christ on the Cross come under the dominion of his constraining love. Not otherwise is that compassion for souls, that yearning pity for the weary and heavy-laden begotten, which makes men and women Christlike in their endeavors to spread the blessing and share the light.”

But, further individual testimony is borne to:

(3) *The Inherent Charm and Value of the Bible.*

The power of this wonderful Book has been felt and witnessed to in all ages and countries by persons of the most diverse rank, accomplishment, and occupation, the learned and the ignorant, the rich and the poor, princes and peasants, statesmen and salesmen, writers and warriors, artists and artisans, sculptors and shepherds, musicians and merchants, poets and planters.

Men as widely separated by predilection and persuasion as Renan and Faber, Rousseau and Newman, Hooker and Theodore Parker, Huxley and Browning, Heine and Gladstone, Wesley and Goethe, Wilberforce and Kuenen, have poured their impassioned eulogies upon the Bible for its winsome tenderness, its awful directness, its searching power, its amazing pathos, its wonderful insight, its literary charm, and its universal reach.

“What a Book!” exclaimed Heine, “vast and wide as the world! Rooted in the abysses of creation, and towering up beyond the blue secrets of heaven! Sunrise and sunset, birth and death, promise and fulfillment, the whole drama of humanity are all in this Book!”

And Coleridge said, “In the Bible there is more that finds me than I have experienced in all other books put together: the words of the Bible find me at greater depths of my being; and whatever finds me brings with it an irresistible evidence of its having proceeded from the Holy Spirit.”

Volumes might be written on the Bible, viewed from this standpoint, but, enough. This is “beyond all other books the Book of the world. Other books are for special times or separate races; this Book has been dear in every age to men of all races. Other books are for the poor or for the rich; this Book regards poor and rich alike, not under the inch-high differences of wealth and rank, but as heirs alike of the common mysteries of life and death, of redemption and immortality. Other books are for the mature or the youthful; this Book alone neither wearies the aged, nor repels the young. Other books are only for the learned, or only for the ignorant; this Book, in the sweetest and simplest elements of its revelation, is as dear to the philosopher as to the Negro’s child. In it mind speaks to mind, and heart to heart, and soul to soul.”

In closing, something must be said about a larger aspect of the subject; namely:

2. THE WITNESS OF CHRISTIANITY TO THE BIBLE.

Here, briefly, let us consider the sources, the progress, and the influence of Christianity.

(1) *The Sources of Christianity.* These, it may be said, are threefold:

(a) *Christ is the Origination of Christianity.* Professor Hugh Mackintosh has defined Christianity as “the religion which holds as its fundamental tenet that in the historic person, Jesus of Nazareth, God has been perfectly revealed as Father.”

Christianity is not a church, not a creed, not a ritual, not a tradition, and we must also say, not a book. Christianity is Christ, the revelation of God as Life, Light, and Love, first in the historic and personal Christ, and then in the historic and mystical Christ. Christianity essentially is Christ, and that leads me to say that:

(b) *The Church is the Articulation of Christianity.* Reference has just been made to the historic and mystical Christ, by which we mean the living Head in heaven, and his living members on earth. As the head functions through the body, so the absent, living Lord articulates through his Church. She is, or should be, the expression and reflection here on earth of him. Yet how has the Church through these ages been able to know him that she might love and serve him? Someone will say, “By the indwelling and illuminating Holy Spirit.” True, but that only leads to a further question, How have Christians been able these nearly two thousand years to know what was of and from the Holy Spirit, and what was not? Has everyone been a law to himself in this matter so vital, or is there any court of appeal, any body and standard of truth, by which the claims to one’s having received illumination may be brought and tested? The answer to that must be:

(c) *The Bible is the Definition of Christianity.* Perhaps it will be claimed that experience is that definition. But we ask at once, Whose? When one thinks of the endless variety of religious experience and belief in the world at any given time, we see how hopeless would be the quest of the truth, unless, out of ourselves, there were a revelation from God. But that revelation we have in the Bible, or, more strictly, the Bible is the inspired record of that revelation. "In sacred Scripture," says an old Confession, "the Church has a most full exposition of whatsoever pertains both to saving faith and to the right molding of the life which is pleasing to God"; and Protestantism affirms that it is perfect in its authority, sufficiency, perspicuity, and efficacy.

The Lutheran, the Reformed, and the Armenian Churches unite in the declaration that "Christianity is a divine revelation communicated to mankind through Christ, the saving truths of which must be derived from the Bible alone"; the Romish and Greek Churches add tradition to the Bible; but the Westminster Doctrine is most emphatic against any subtraction or addition when it says, "The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man or church, but wholly upon God, the Author thereof; and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God."

The facts concerning the historic Christ, not to speak of the apostolic interpretation of those facts under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, would long ago have been forgotten, or else so overlaid by the accretions of superstition as to be unrecognizable, had not those facts and interpretations early found fixity as in the Bible.

But let us pass from the sources, to look for a moment at:

(2) *The Progress of Christianity.* We have already touched upon:

(a) *The Early Struggle.* Church historians speak of the first three centuries as the period of persecution, and how widespread and fierce that persecution was let the Catacombs witness, with their four million graves, according to a moderate calculation. How colossal were the powers arrayed against those first believers! All the odds, judged from the standpoint of the world, were against that little company of "the Way," who dared to stand by conviction and principle in the face of Rome's authority and power. Yet this they did at the uttermost cost, and even gloried in their sufferings.

Christianity spent her first three centuries in one long, legalized, almost unbroken persecution, yet by their tremendous spirit they conquered their conquerors, and died only to live more gloriously.

Neither Nero, Decius, nor Diocletian could quench their ardor, nor prison, rack, sword, nor shirt of flame compel them to deny their Lord.

"The nearer I am to the sword," said Ignatius, "the nearer to God."

But side by side with these persecutions came:

(b) *The Increasing Recognition of Christianity.*

This was widespread, as the Catacombs show; but it was not, as Gibbon sneeringly affirmed, a recognition on the part “almost entirely of the dregs of the populace, of peasants and mechanics, of boys and women, of beggars and slaves.” Professor Ramsay has said that Christianity “spread first among the educated more rapidly than among the uneducated”; and certain it is that the divine power drew to it men of all of society from the beginning, and often the persons in higher station were the first to come, and through their example brought others. The heathen themselves became profoundly alarmed at the progress of Christianity. “Men cry out,” says Tertullian, “that the State is besieged; the Christians are in the fields, in the forts, in the islands; they mourn, as for a loss, that every sex, age, condition and even rank, is going over to this sect.”

The advance of Christianity was not only vertical, but lateral, as Orr would say, and we have it from Justin Martyr that “there is not one single race of men, whether barbarians, or Greeks, or whatever they may be called, nomads, or vagrants, or herdsmen dwelling in tents, among whom prayers and giving of thanks are not offered, through the name of the Crucified Jesus.” Yet the testimony of the Catacombs is not only to the multitude who believed, they also bear witness by their elegance, refinement, and construction and elaboration of decoration, that large numbers of these were of the wealthier class. And so, out of the struggle, and by way of the recognition of Christianity, came:

(c) *The Final Triumph.*

How great that triumph was they only can know who have paid some attention to the history of that period. Farrar, in the “*Witness of History to Christ*,” says:

“Nothing could have appeared more deplorable than the weakness of the new religion. It numbered but a handful of timid followers, of whom the boldest had denied his Lord with blasphemy, and the most devoted had forsaken him and fled. They were poor, they were ignorant, they were helpless. They could not claim a single synagogue, or a single sword. If they spoke their own language, it betrayed them by its mongrel dialect; if they spoke the current Greek, it was despised as a miserable patois. And of their two doctrines – the Crucifixion and the Resurrection – the one inspired indignant horror, and the other unbounded scorn. But when they were weak, then were they strong. They had been consecrated for their mighty work by no earthly Christ; they had been baptized by the Holy Ghost and with fire; each faithless heart had been dilated with celestial courage: each lowly forehead mitered with Pentecostal flame.”

It was because of this, that at the end of the ten years’ persecution, when the enemies of Christ supposed that they had extirpated his worship forever, multitudes were ready to bow before the standard of the Cross.

Gibbon, in a well-known passage, assigns five reasons for this wonderful and irresistible triumph of Christianity:

“1. The inflexible and, if we may use the expression, the intolerant zeal of the Christians, derived, it is true, from the Jewish religion, but purified from the narrow and unsocial spirit which, instead of inviting, had deterred the Gentile from embracing the law of Moses.

“2. The doctrine of a future life, improved by every additional circumstance which could give weight and efficacy to that important truth.

“3. The miraculous powers ascribed to the primitive Church.

“4. The pure and austere morals of the Christians.

“5. The union and discipline of the Christian republic, which gradually formed an independent and increasing State in the heart of the Roman Empire.”

With the exception, perhaps, of the third, let these reasons be admitted to the full, and coming from such a quarter the testimony is the mightier. It was the Man of Nazareth who had wrought the great change by which “the Catacomb triumphed over the Grecian temple; the Cross of shame over the wine cup and the Salian banquet, the song of the Siren, and the wreath of rose.

“These obscure sectaries – barbarians, Orientals, Jews, as they were – fought against the indignant world and won. ‘**Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts**’: by heroic endurance, by stainless innocence, by burning zeal, by inviolable truthfulness, by boundless love. The world’s seductive ideals and intoxicating joys, the world’s enchanting mythologies and dissolute religions, all fled before a cross of wood!”

So far we have been considering the progress of the Gospel during the first three or four centuries of our era, but that is only a part of the story, and this rapid survey would be obviously incomplete without a reference, however brief, to:

(3) *The Influence of Christianity*. Many volumes could not exhaust this aspect of the subject, for Christianity has invaded every realm and left an indelible impress upon the individual, society, and the race.

But Christianity is the promulgation of a revelation and the expression of a life. That revelation is recorded in, and that life is communicated through, the Scriptures, without which Christianity could not have survived. Therefore when we speak of the influence of Christianity, we have here in view more particularly the influence of that Book in Which we find its sum and substance. Think, then, for a moment of:

(a) *The Literary and Aesthetic Influence of the Bible*.

The Bible is more than literature, but it certainly is literature, and that at its best; truly it has been and is an “Academy of Letters” in the land. Who can measure the influence of these Scriptures upon the best minds and the greatest writers of the world? Landor said that the Bible is “a Book which, to say nothing of its holiness or authority, contains more specimens of genius and taste than any other volume in existence.” Froude said, “The Bible thoroughly known is a literature in itself . . . the rarest and richest in all departments of thought or imagination which exists.” And Macaulay speaks of it as “that stupendous work . . . a book, which, if everything else in our language should perish, would alone suffice to show the whole extent of its beauty and power.”

It requires but a brief examination of the makers of our literature “to show that it is not merely that Scripture is often quoted and alluded to, but that its words and images have entered into the very warp and woof of the cloth of gold which they have woven for the generations which follow after.

To be ignorant of the Bible is to lack the key of the treasury alike in literature and grace.

J. R. Green, in speaking of the effects of the Bible on Puritan England, eloquently says:

“As a mere literary monument, the English Version of the Bible remains the noblest example of the English tongue, while its perpetual use made it from the instant of its appearance the standard of our language.

“It formed, we must repeat, the whole literature which was practically accessible to ordinary Englishmen; and when we recall the number of common phrases which we owe to great authors, the bits of Shakespeare, or Milton, or Dickens, or Thackeray, which unconsciously interweave themselves in our ordinary talk, we shall better understand the strange mosaic of Biblical words and phrases which colored English talk two hundred years ago.

“The mass of picturesque allusion and illustration which we borrow from a thousand books, our fathers were forced to borrow from one; and the borrowing was the easier and the more natural that the range of the Hebrew literature fitted it for the expression of every phase of feeling. When Spenser poured forth his warmest love-notes in the ‘Epithalamion,’ he adopted the very words of the Psalmist, as he bade the gates open for the entrance of his bride. When Cromwell saw the mists break over the hills of Dunbar, he hailed the sun-burst with the cry of David: **‘Let God arise, and let his enemies be scattered. Like as the smoke vanisheth, so shalt thou drive them away.’** Even to common minds this familiarity with grand poetic imagery in prophet and apocalypse gave a loftiness of ardor and expression that, with all its tendency to exaggeration and bombast, we may prefer to the slipshod vulgarisms of to-day.”

But why multiply witnesses? It would be easy to quote from scores of master-minds, such as Augustine, and Dante, and Milton, and Shakespeare, and Goethe, and Bacon, and Pascal, and Scott, and Carlyle, and Ruskin, and Browning, and Arnold, and Tennyson, and Gladstone. But there is no need. The Bible is its own greatest witness. It is self-authenticating.

Is there anyone work in all non-Christian literature that could be classed with the “*Civitas Dei*,” the “*Divina Commedia*,” the “*Summa Theologiae*,” the “*Imitatio Christi*,” the “*Paradise Lost*,” the “*Pilgrim’s Progress*”? These are matchless in their kind, and they owe their supremacy to their kinship with the Bible.

“Will you set the ‘*Confessions*’ of Rousseau,” it has been asked, “side by side with the ‘*Confessions*’ of Augustine, or compare Paine’s ‘*Age of Reason*’ with Hooker’s ‘*Ecclesiastical Polity*’?”

Does not the history of all literature prove that not even the brightest wit or the keenest genius – not even the stately eloquence of Bolingbroke, or the universal learning of Diderot, or the glowing imagination of Byron, or the flashing witticisms of Voltaire – can save the writings of men, however gifted, from perishing of inevitable decay, if they sin against the rules of morality, or are aimed against the principles of faith?”

The greatest test of literature is time, and the fact is patent that, whereas the books of far-away time are to-day read by scarcely anyone outside of the class-room, and whereas books of more recent times which had a great reception on their appearance are already almost forgotten, the Bible is being more translated and circulated now than ever before, and is being read, not by one nation only, but by all nations, for "it has not only overleaped the barrier of time, but it is the only book in the whole world that has been able to overleap the barrier of nationality."

And we need not do more here than affirm that its aesthetic influence has been as great as its literary influence. To estimate that influence upon art, we have but to recall the names of such as Giotto, and Rembrandt, and Tintoretto, and Botticelli, and Fra Angelico, and Raphael, and Michelangelo, who owed more to their subjects than their subjects could ever owe them. When a Dante and a Milton would find themes which would give scope to their genius and range for their thought, they turn to religion and the Bible, and receive there both suggestion and inspiration for the "*Divine Comedy*" and "*Paradise Lost*." Turning to oratorio, we see that all the masters wrought on this highest level. Handel's "*Messiah*," Hady's "*Creation*," and Mendelssohn's "*Elijah*," not to speak of Spohr, Sullivan, Bach, Mackenzie, Elgar, are so universally and perennially cherished just because they touch us at the center and sound us to the depths.

The influence also of the Bible upon sculpture and architecture has been widespread and abiding. The realms of thought, feeling, and action have all been invaded, elevated, and ennobled by this Book of books. Eloquently has Farrar summarized the influence of the Bible in this direction. He says:

"It is a literature which no age or nation can equal or supersede, though every library in the world had remained unravaged, and every teacher's truest words had been written down. What problems do these books leave unexamined? What depths unfathomed? What heights unsealed? What consolation unadministered? What conscience unreprieved? What heart untouched? How absurd it must be to scoff at a book which, through all the long centuries, thousands of great men have revered in proportion to their greatness: a book for which, in age after age, warriors have fought, philosophers labored, and martyrs bled!

"Its literary splendor was acknowledged even by heathen critics like Longinus, who referred to the sublimity of Genesis and the impassioned force of Paul. It exercised the toil of Origen and Jerome; it fired the eloquence of Gregory and Chrysostom; it molded the thought of Athanasius and Augustine; the '*Summa Theologiae*' of Thomas Aquinas was but a meditation upon its theology, and the '*Imitatio Christi*' of Thomas a Kempis an attempt to express its spirituality. All that is best and greatest in the literature of two thousand years has been rooted in it and has sprung from it. It has inspired the career of all the best of men who raised strong arms to bring heaven a little nearer to our earth. Vincent de Paul learned from its pages his tenderness for the poor, and John Howard his love for the suffering, and William Wilberforce his compassion for the slaves, and Lord Shaftesbury the dedication of his life to the amelioration of the lot of his fellow-men. Has there been one of our foremost statesmen or our best philanthropists who has not confessed the force of its inspiration? It dilated and inspired the immortal song of Dante and of Milton. All the best and brightest English verse, from the poems of Chaucer to the plays of Shakespeare in their noblest parts, are echoes of its lessons; and from Cowper to Wordsworth, from Coleridge to Tennyson, the greatest of our poets have drawn from its pages their loftiest wisdom.

“It inspired the pictures of Fra Angelico and Raphael, the music of Handel and Mendelssohn. It kindled the intrepid genius of Luther, the bright imagination of Bunyan, the burning zeal of Whitfield. The hundred best books, the hundred best pictures, the hundred greatest strains of music, are all in it and all derived from it.”

And who can estimate:

(b) *The Domestic and Social Influence of the Bible.*

From the very beginning the Bible was learned and cherished in the home; Timothy knew the Holy Scriptures “**from a child.**” It was the first reading book; and it is held by some that the number of Bibles to be found in private houses in the first three centuries has been underestimated. Tertullian tells us that the reading of the Bible in common was one of the practices of the Christian home; and he urges this fact as an argument against mixed marriages, because in such a case the custom becomes impracticable. He also pictures how husband and wife entertain each other with psalms and hymns, and vie with each other as to who shall best sing to God’s praise. Tatian speaks, of Christian maidens sitting at the distaff and singing about the divine revelation. A picture of domestic piety is furnished by the occasion of Monica’s death. Her son Augustine and his son Adeodatus were overwhelmed with grief. Eodius took the Psalter and intoned the One Hundred and Tenth Psalm, all present making response.

All the teachers of the first centuries, Justin tells us, counted upon this private use of the Scripture and encouraged it. When, in the time of Constantine, public worship was by many being substituted for private devotion, preachers exhorted the people to use the Bible at home.

The dark Middle Ages brought a decline in the reading of the Bible, but that practice was revived with the awakening soul of nations, and when the art of printing was introduced the Bible became the people’s Book, and daily Bible reading was regarded as a Christian’s duty.

In the nature of the case we have not a wide literature that we can consult on the subject of private and domestic reading of the Scriptures, yet, scattered through memoirs, biographies, and elsewhere are to be found many illustrations.

We learn from the letters of Bismarck to his wife that he read his Bible daily.

When Oliver Cromwell was dying he asked that Philippians 4:11-13 should be read to him.

“He repeated the words of the passage to himself. When the apostle spoke of his contentment and submission to the will of God in all conditions, he said: ‘It’s true, Paul, you have learned this, and attained to this measure of grace, but what shall I do? Ah, poor creature, it is a hard lesson for me to take out! I find it so.’ But when he came to the words which followed, faith began to work, and his heart found comfort and support, and he said, ‘He that was Paul’s Christ is my Christ too’; and so he drew water out of the wells of salvation.”

We all know the story of Sir Walter Scott, who when dying said:

“Bring me the Book.” “What book?” asked Lockhart, his son-in-law. “The Book,” said Sir Walter; “the Bible, there is but one.”

And J. M. Barrie relates that a short time before his mother died his father put her Testament into her hand, and it fell open at the fourteenth chapter of John. She had been a great sufferer, and she knew where to seek for comfort and strength.

But perhaps there is no finer illustration of the place and power of the Bible in the home than the picture which Robert Burns has drawn of a family gathering round the Bible, in his “*Cottar’s Saturday Night*.”

To look at the father as he:

“Wales a portion wi’ judicious care,”

and to hear them sing their evening psalm, and think of what such exercises imply, is to see how abundantly warranted was the patriotic outburst that:

“From scenes like these old Scotia’s grandeur springs,
That makes her loved at home, revered abroad.”

Well does Mr. Muir say, “The home-life which gathers round the Bible and the family altar is sacred in every way; and the nation is sane and strong, free and prosperous, in proportion to the Bible-loving homes within her borders.” The cry for “altar and hearth” has its fulness of meaning only for those who have Christian homes. The conception of the family Bible is a very beautiful and grand one.

And what can we say of the social influence of the Bible? So widespread has this influence been, so continuous and pronounced, that to relate it would be to relate the history of civilization. Under the beneficent influence of the Bible cruelty has given place to pity, corruption has given place to high moral standards, and slavery has given place to the right to freedom. It is the Bible that has taught us to reverence womanhood and to safeguard childhood. It is the Bible that has motivated the establishment of asylums, hospitals and orphanages, that has sent out into the world noble Christian patriots like Wilberforce and Granville Sharp, and Robert Raikes and John Howard, and Elizabeth Fry and Catharine Booth.

The Bible has always been, and ever will remain, the sworn enemy of corruption and oppression, and the mother of compassion and liberty, and nations, no less than society, and souls, have received its deep divine impress.” It was the Bible which saved England from sinking into a tenth-rate power, as a vassal of cruel, ignorant, superstitious Spain, whose Dominicans and tyrants would have turned her fields into slaughter-houses, as they turned those of the Netherlands, and would have made her cities reek as she made Seville reek with the bale-fires of her Inquisition! This queen of books is essentially freeing, health-giving, ennobling, inspiring, and were all its beneficent effects extracted from society and civilization, we would all be back to paganism and barbarism.

One other aspect must be just touched upon; namely,

(c) The Moral and Spiritual Influence of the Bible.

All moral awakening and spiritual quickening are traceable directly to the Word of God. Never has there been a true revival of religion in our own or any land that did not originate in and lead to this divine revelation. It is the foundation of the Church's faith, and the spring of her life. In earlier times, in Scotland, when the light of the Reformation was breaking, one of the nicknames of those who sought to be obedient to the truth that God was revealing was "New Testamenters," – a name which speaks for itself.

Yes, truly, this Book is the Word of God.

Other books, the very best, disappoint and fail us, but this one never. Other books come and go, but this one abides forever. Other books appeal to intellect, or conscience, or heart, but this one appeals to them all. Other books are for certain occasions and seasons, but this one is needed at all times and is equal to all occasions. Other books are for specific people and ages, but this one is universal and timeless.

No book has been more bitterly assailed, neither one so gloriously vindicated. Julian and Celsus, and Porphyry, and Bolingbroke, and Hume, and Voltaire, and Strauss, and Renan, and Eichhorn, and Graf, and Wellhausen, and Kuenen, have all fired their deadliest volleys; yet, in spite of all, it marches on to ever new triumphs, seeming to be, claiming to be, and proving itself to be, the Living Word of God.

FINAL WORD

If, then, the foregoing be true, it is the manifest duty of everyone of us to believe what God has here revealed of himself and his saving purpose and power, and to obey what here he has enjoined.

We may read a thousand volumes and feel under no obligation to pay any further attention to any of them, but not so with the Bible. It never leaves a man where it finds him, because it bestows privilege, opens up opportunity, and creates responsibility every time we consult its pages. Being of divine origin, it speaks with sovereign authority, and each of us turns aside from it at the cost of his present and eternal undoing.

Let us take this precious Word to our bosoms and our business, and prove it to be more than sufficient alike for faith and practice.

~ end of book ~

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