

CONVENTION SERMON.

The Bible and Gold—a Comparison.

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A Sermon preached before the Baptist Convention of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and P. E. Island, at Wolfville, N. S., on Monday, August 27th, 1877.

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“More to be desired are they than gold; yea, than much fine gold.”—PSALM XIX. 10.

The subject before us is, The Bible compared to gold. A discourse on such a subject may be thought to be more suitable for the anniversary of a Bible Society than for such a meeting as this. But are not the Institutions whose interests we now meet to consider, in a very important sense Bible Institutions. Our missionary work is Bible work, both in the proclamation of the gospel, and also in the scarcely subordinate work of teaching the young. And as to the Educational Institution, which is under the fostering care of the churches here represented, it is, and we may hope will be, increasingly a Bible Institution. If it should ever cease to be identified with the dissemination of the Word of God, if it should ever cease to impart a decidedly religious influence to its students, for what profession soever they may be intended, the churches would no doubt say “let Ichabod be written upon its walls; for its glory has departed.” Thus much by way of connecting the subject before us with the institutions whose important business we are now met to transact.

In this commercial age the method of the inspired writer ought not to appeal to us in vain. How often are the great moral questions of the day, in some of their aspects at least, brought home to the understanding by exhibiting the great pecuniary loss or gain resulting from a course of vice or virtue. In a similar manner we are appealed to through the figure of the text. As though the Psalmist had said to us, “You know something of the value of gold in its varied uses; this precious word of God is all that, and more.” Let us then make a stepping-stone of the perishable gold, that by it we may reach and possess the true riches.

Proceeding through a series of analogies let us first direct our attention to the manner of distribution of the precious metal as compared with that of the precious word. Not as the base metals is gold found, in large deposits spread over a wide area; but here and there, in scattered patches, distant from each other, and discovered through the ages, a mine opened in this century and another in that, keeping pace with the necessities of commerce, till its wonderful expansion was met by the equally wonderful discoveries of the precious metal in the recent past. What a true picture of the plan of the divine operation in spiritual things! First a little here, then a little there; “at sundry times and in divers manners God spake unto the fathers by the prophets,” now a Psalm written on the hill-side, and anon a string of pearly proverbs in the palace; sometimes by visions of the night, at other times by audible voice in the busy hours of the day. Through the ages did God thus open to us the treasures of his word; keeping pace with the requirements of man till the fullness of time came, when the spiritual kingdom of our God and Father was no longer to be confined within its previously narrow bounds, but when it was to stretch forth on the right hand and on the left in the gospel age. Now, the golden treasures were displayed not in mere surface indications, as in the types and shadows of the old economy, but in all the fulness of their hidden wealth. “For in these last days He hath spoken unto us by His Son,” opening to us in the books of the New Testament, the very eldorado of the Bible. Here we have a field in which there is ample room for all—the giant mind as well as the humbler seeker after the golden truth of God. But I am reminded by the last statement of another peculiarity of distribution—the varied distribution of treasured wealth in the Bible. A miner may plod on for a long period in his search for gold, and get only enough to live by. But let him continue his search with faithful steadiness of purpose and he will come upon the larger deposits—the nuggets

or bonanzas. How well this is understood and how faithfully it is acted upon in the things of this lower life! Brethren, it has its parallel in the word of God. Let a faithful, diligent search be made, not a sudden leaping from place to place, but as for hid treasure, careful lest in leaving some portion unsearched we should pass some hidden deposit that would more than repay us for all our trouble. Desultory working sometimes causes the loss of the most precious prize. I remember the case of a miner in Australia, who wrought a little in one of the mines, but soon ceased his work and went to some other place. Another miner took possession of the abandoned mine, and, after working some time, turned out a piece of gold worth about twenty thousand dollars. But what think you, brethren? there was a pick mark left on the nugget by the previous miner. I verily believe there is many a nugget to be found in the word of God with the pick mark upon it. Some one has touched it, but has not become its possessor. As we behold the wonderful results of the patient labor of some students of the divine word during recent years, what encouragement there is for us to follow their example.

II. Let me call your attention to another characteristic common to gold and the Bible—purity. Break off a fragment from the rich gold-bearing rock and you see the precious metal shine forth in all its purity. Seek gold in the beds of the streams to which through ages it has been washed, and you find it unmingled with other metals. Yes, clear away the accumulations with which ages have covered it, and you find it uncorroded and pure with all its native beauty upon it. Like gold, the precious word has sometimes been overlaid full many a fathom deep. Human tradition has buried it. The Pharisees of old thus hid it from view; and there are many, alas, in our own days, who follow closely in their steps. But let the traditions of man be removed, and the pure heaven-sent treasure shines forth. I am here reminded of our deep indebtedness to those brethren who, all unknown to the great body of God's people, have spent their lives in constant labor to free the book of God from those additions which man designedly, or otherwise, has made to it. All honor to those noble Christian scholars, who have thus wrought in the past. Their worth is better estimated than it was, and will be so increasingly, by the church of Christ in the future. We see in the labors of these men how closely connected is sound scholarship with the Bible. But literal purity is only the means to moral purity. We want the Bible as it came from God, that we may draw from it a pure morality and Christianity; for instance, that we may know that the will of God is that we should “repent, and not do penance.” We want it pure, that we may see our Saviour in all his brightness, as the Sun of Righteousness; for Jesus said, “Search the Scriptures, for in them ye have eternal life and they are they which testify of me.” In this dark world, where everything is in greater or less degree befouled by sin, the pure word of God should be a source of constant delight to those who are called to be saints. With the Psalmist we should say “Thy word is very pure, therefore thy servant loveth it.”

III. Another point common to gold and the Bible is wonderful adaptability as a universal circulating medium. The Bible is not only gold; it bears the image of the great King. There is no country which possesses even a partial civilization but will readily accept gold as the medium of exchange; there is no land where God is known but requires this word as the currency of its higher life. No one can faithfully and without prejudice read the Bible but must be impressed with the fact that it is not to be classed with other books. It is in very deed, the Bible, the Book of books. As we look upon an ancient coin for the image and superscription, and know thereby to whose kingdom it belonged, so looking here we shall not be disappointed, but shall find the King's image and see his glorious name. Its divine origin is most beautifully seen in the point under review—its admirable adaptability to the universal wants of man. It was given by inspiration of God. There are professed friends of the kingdom of Christ who say this. What are

they but coin-defacers? Brethren, let us seek to preserve the image of the King, and, in order to this, preserve most carefully this characteristic of the Bible as distinguished from all other books, that it comes to us from God. Here then we have given by the King a currency which knows no depreciation, but which shall freely pass through every part of his kingdom as long as the great King reigns; and his kingdom is everlasting, his dominion without end.

IV. Another point common to gold and the Bible is increasing demand. As civilization advances, gold becomes an increasing necessity. The important part it plays may be seen betimes in the misery and ruin which follow the mere obstruction of its channels. If a temporary obstruction only cause such sad effects what would be the effect of its entire withdrawal? The wheels of the great social machine would be ready to cease. Death would be the effect to a thousand things which now are the boast of our civilization. Once it was thought by not a few that the rapidly increasing production of gold would destroy its value and render it as a base metal; but it still holds its place, and every succeeding age requires more of it, for there is much of this earth yet requiring to be subdued by its magic power. Turn to the golden word of God. If God were to take the Bible from the world—the Bible as written in the sacred page, and as written on the heart of his people—what a calamity it would be. As the loss of capital affects not only the man who possessed it, but also the poor man who is perhaps unconsciously living by it; so, if the Bible were withdrawn from the world, millions would suffer who are indirectly receiving blessings every day from its rich store.

But the Bible is in increasing demand. The calamity next to such as I have supposed, would be its restriction to its present use. The world demands it more and more. The semi-infidel may say the world has outgrown it; but the facts of the case are exactly the opposite. There never was a time when the world so much needed it. Its population is rapidly increasing. India, China, Africa, remain the same in area; but if the gospel go not forth increasingly—if the heralds of the cross are not multiplied in heathen lands—we shall require a darker colour to depict them in our missionary maps. May God grant that instead of this, by the efforts of an increasing band of gospel heralds, we may require to rectify our maps by giving a lighter and still lighter shade, till the glorious day shall come when, by its entire disappearance, they shall reveal the joyous news that the kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of the Lord.

But not only extensively, but intensively, is the Bible in greater demand. The increase of wealth opens many a way to temptation. We require increasingly, in the heart and life, the spiritual gold, to act as a counterpoise to the material. There is great danger of the Church of Christ becoming too wealthy if there be not within the soul a proportionate growth in spiritual wealth. There are other reasons I might mention why we need more of Bible influence in our lives. For instance, consider the corrupting nature of much of the literature of our times. The poisonous novel is often read till a taste for the pure word of God is almost obliterated. The Bible is a book for all time, and should never be displaced by anything which man can produce. The widespread propagation of error renders it necessary that the Bible shall become increasingly our guide. It has been said and echoed widely that “the Bible, and the Bible only, is the religion of Protestants.” We believe, as a denomination, we may take up the strain, and with more of truth say, “the Bible, the Bible only, is the religion of Baptists.” Brethren, it is the sword of the Spirit which has served us in many a hard fought field. We owe our position as a denomination to this, that we have accepted the Bible in its entirety as our guide-book in doctrine and practice. If our position in the future is to be one worthy of the truth we have espoused, it must be won and defended by the blade which has never deceived us.

Let me appeal to my brethren in the ministry, and also, and especially, to influential non-ministerial brethren, for a change in our methods in regard to

Bible teaching. There are many of our people who scarcely know the first principles of the doctrine of Christ, whereas it ought to be that every Baptist should be able to go forth, Bible in hand, and therefrom convince the gain-sayers. Ought we not in our public ministrations to have more of exposition and less of preaching from a single detached scripture. However appropriate the latter may be in urging a point of doctrine or duty, surely it ought not to be adopted to the exclusion of exposition of larger portions of the Word which require to be studied in their connection. The method, which is not new, and which happily is growing, of the whole congregation meeting as a Bible class, is one that would serve us admirably in the direction I am seeking to indicate. By these methods we should gain much. Our people would have a better hold of the truth, and would, moreover, cherish a deeper love for it, which would not only act upon them personally, but upon their children, for it would not then be counted a matter of indifference whether they went to this or that Sabbath School, or what error was imbibed through this or that pleasantly written book, even though it be obtained from the Sabbath School Library. These among other important matters show that the Bible, as a textbook in our hands and an influential power in our hearts, is an increasing necessity of our time.

V. Gold and the Bible agree also in this, that they are alike representative of wealth. Those persons entertain a wrong notion of gold who suppose it to be in itself wealth. It is the representative of wealth. It tells us of work in the past and of store laid up for the future. Its purchasing power is its real worth: the readiness with which it may be exchanged for those things which are a felt need. Now this is a characteristic of the divine word we should never lose sight of, that it is the golden currency of the kingdom of our God and his Christ. It is representative of the accumulations of the divine provision. It tells of stores of wealth such as material gold cannot purchase—“treasure in heaven where moth and rust doth not corrupt nor thieves break through and steal.” Some of these heavenly treasures are prepared for earthly use. How shall we obtain them? By taking the golden promises of our God and seeking an exchange at his hands. The great King never will reject his own coin: his promises are in Jesus, yea and amen. Should we not then have the spiritual purse well filled with the coin from the heavenly mint? Why is it that so many prayers are offered, and much leanness of soul still prevails? Surely it must be a lack of faith in the purchasing power of the promises; or that we do not bring them to God at all to exchange for our wants.

But finally, the Bible is more than gold. It is the warrant of the King for our acquittal. By nature we are children of wrath, condemned already. All the wealth of the world would be of no use to a condemned criminal. His first want is pardon, which by him would be “more to be desired than gold, yea, than much fine gold.” This is just what the Bible is to us. It meets us in our greatest need. When it is within us, a matter of heart and life, it brings freedom from condemnation, because we are in Christ Jesus. It is the charter of our spiritual liberties—the Magna Charta of God's kingdom, bringing freedom to all within its wide domain. Not wrung from an unwilling king; but given as a pledge of everlasting love to rebellious subjects; having upon it the red seal of the King—the blood of his beloved Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Thus, given by the Father, sealed in the blood of the Son, applied by the Holy Spirit, it shall go forth as the power of God unto salvation, till all shall know him, from the least to the greatest.

For the Christian Messenger, ANNAPOLIS COUNTY SUNDAY-SCHOOL CONVENTION.

The Fourth Annual Sunday-school Convention of Annapolis County met at Clarence Baptist Church on Thursday, Sept. 13th, 1877.

After half an hour spent in devotional exercises conducted by Rev. J. Brown. The President, Mr. S. Spurr

took the chair at 11 o'clock, A. M. A hymn was sung, and prayer was offered by Rev. W. G. Parker. The Constitution was read; and the Secretary presented his report which contained the following statistics:—

No. of schools reported, 4 Union, 7 Methodist, 22 Baptists, total 33. No. of teachers reported, 111 male, 100 female, total 211. No. of scholars reported, 1060 male, 1120 female, total 2180. No. of books in libraries, 4771. Average attendance for 33 schools, 47.

A committee to nominate officers was appointed consisting of Messrs. J. Fitch, S. N. Jackson, J. L. Britain, J. McKay, and A. Longley. They retired and shortly after reported the following nominations for officers who were elected by acclamation:—

President—H. K. Richards. Vice-Presidents—H. Goucher, M. Martin, George North, J. H. Whitman, S. R. Lantz, J. B. Reed, Anderson Healy, H. M. Irvine, J. D. Halfyard, W. V. Vroom and E. J. Elliott.

Secretary—J. E. Armstrong. Assistant Secretaries—J. H. Gates and L. W. Elliott. Treasurer—J. L. Britain. The president H. K. Richards assumed the chair and made a few appropriate remarks. The first subject on the programme, “The obligations resting on professing Christians to engage in Sunday-school work,” was taken up and discussed fifteen for minutes in an eloquent manner by Rev. C. Parker. After music by the choir the discussion was continued by Mr. Dow D. Potter, Rev. W. G. Parker, Rev. J. L. Read, and Mr. W. Allen, till 12.30, when the meeting adjourned with the benediction by Rev. J. Clark.

AFTERNOON SESSION.

The Convention was called to order at 2.30 by the President H. K. Richards. After devotional exercises the discussion commenced during the morning session was continued by Rev. J. Brown, Rev. C. Parker, Mr. H. B. Page, J. B. Hall, Ph. D., Messrs. A. T. Baker, and Benj. Miller. At the close of the discussion Rev. C. Parker offered the following resolution, containing the substance of the ideas advanced in the discussion, which was unanimously adopted.

Resolved, That in view of the importance and pressing needs of our Sunday-school work we leave this Convention with the determination to do all we can to promote the interest of our Sabbath Schools.

The subject, “How shall we study the Bible?” was discussed in an able paper by Rev. J. Clark. Rev. J. Brown, Messrs. O. Dodge, W. Miller, I. Fitch, J. McKay and W. McKenne participated in the discussion which followed. The discussion was closed with the following resolution embodying the heads of Rev. J. Clark's paper.

Resolved, that it is the opinion of this meeting that the Bible should be studied carefully, connectedly, prayerfully, believably, intelligently and practically. Passed unanimously.

The following schools invited the Convention to hold the next annual session with them, respectively, viz.; Stony Beach Baptist School, Methodist and Baptist Sabbath Schools of Annapolis and Tremont Baptist Sabbath Schools. It was decided to hold the next session in Annapolis. The following were appointed as a Managing Committee for next Convention:—

J. D. Halfyard, J. McKay, J. H. Gates, W. V. Vroom, H. Snow, J. E. Armstrong and H. K. Richards.

The afternoon session was closed with the benediction by Rev. J. Brown.

EVENING SESSION.

The Convention was called to order by the President at 7.30. Devotional exercises were conducted by Mr. Robinson. Mr. Spurr being called upon made a few remarks concerning the Maritime Sabbath School Convention lately held in Halifax. He said the Maritime Convention was interesting, but lacked the enthusiasm manifested in our County Convention. President Richards was elected to represent this Convention in the next Maritime Sabbath School Convention.

Mr. J. E. Armstrong then occupied twenty-six minutes in delivering a paper on “Class Work in the Sabbath School.” He referred to the importance of the teacher's work; the need of improvement in our methods of teaching; showed how they might be improved; and recommended a blending of the questioning and illustrative methods. Rev. C. Parker and Mr. I. Fitch made a few remarks after which the following resolution was adopted:—