

Varieties.

THE DEVOTIONAL STUDY OF THE SCRIPTURES.

From a letter by the late Rev. Henry Venn.

You have ever, dear Sir, been long out of my thoughts, since you asked me what comment was best on the Bible. The inquiry indicated a desire to know and please God. It implied a conviction, which all must feel before they can be saved, that Divine knowledge is infinitely preferable to all human sciences. In answer to your question I can, from a happy experience, assure you there is one certain way (and I conclude but one) of acquiring spiritual understanding.

It is a laborious one, and very contrary to our natural love of ease. You will find it in the second chapter of Proverbs, and the first nine verses, compared with the command, sixth chapter of Deuteronomy, fourth to ninth verse. From hence it is plain, that much pains must be taken in pondering on the Word of God: we must read it with as much attention as we do a mathematical proposition, and add to our attention earnest prayer that our understanding may be opened to understand the Scripture.

The parts of Scripture we must read in this manner, above the rest, are such as describe the majesty of Jehovah; the Godhead of Christ; his power, grace, and redemption of sinners; our natural condition, and the transformation begun and carried on in the souls of the faithful. These are the material and fundamental articles called, by the Holy Ghost, "the wonderful things of God's Law." You are to read a little at a time. What you do not understand, confess before the Lord, and ask the explanation, as you would from your own dear father, of anything he could make clear to you. Say, "My Lord! what meaneth this? It is very dark to my mind, I can receive no benefit from it, through the ignorance which is in me." Say, when you read the most glorious account of His love, His power, His victory, and triumph,—"Lord, I see not these things in a light to charm and captivate me, not as realities, infinitely interesting to my soul, not as to engage me to covet earnestly a share in them." When you read the Scriptures which delineate fallen man, say,—"Lord, how little am I humbled under this charge! how little ashamed of my depravity! how have I flattered myself, instead of confessing my sin!" To make more clear this method of reading Scripture—which alone, I think, honours it as the word of God; I will give you a specimen upon Hannah's song, 1 Sam. ii. 1-10. When I read the first verse, I look up and ask, "Oh that my heart may rejoice in the Lord!" not in temporal advantages, or creature good. I say, "O Lord, exalt my horn or power, enlarge my mouth over my enemy!" And I call to mind my peculiar temptations, my besetting sin, and the dreadful assaults made upon me. Then I proceed to meditate on the Lord, Holy, Almighty, unchangeable; endeavouring to recollect the Scripture facts which display the Divine attributes. In the third, fourth, and fifth verses, I consider the doom and end of the proud and arrogant opposers of God's government and truth. In the next five verses, I reflect upon His absolute dominion over health and strength, life and death, poverty and wealth.—His condescension to the self-condemned and vile in their own eyes.—His love for the faithful, and vengeance against his adversaries. I read and meditate upon these ten verses, till grand ideas of the Lord penetrate my ignorant mind; till I feel His favour is more than words can express, and His displeasure the greatest evil.

By practice and habit this method of reading becomes delightful; and what knowledge is thus gained, you will never lose. The Bible is a perfect work of itself. Excepting matters of chronology and prophetic parts not yet fulfilled, a diligent and devout perusal will be the means of explaining it sufficiently. We often are destitute of the spirit of prayer, and therefore find it irksome to bow our knees; but in this manner of reading the Scriptures I have seldom failed of finding light and love springing up in my heart, and grace to pour out my prayer, as the passage engaging my meditation suggest.

OLD MOSES!

"You seem to be enduring the curse pronounced upon fallen man—getting your bread by the sweat of your brow."

"Ah, Massa," replied the poor negro, whose head was whitened with age, whilst the deep wrinkles in his face, and a stoop in his shoulders, indicated that he had seen many years, and suffered many hardships. "Ah, Massa," said he, wiping the falling sweat from his face, "I have no reason to complain. I have a great many blessings left yet. I have Jesus Christ and his Gospel, and that is enough for poor old Moses."

"As you seem to be quite shut out from the world here, I suppose you have but few temptations?"

"Ah, Massa," said he, "wherever I go, I carry the bad heart with me," putting his hand to his breast, "and that it is which lets in the world. I have to pray against the world at night, and in the morning, and then I have to fight against it all day. The devil can get up here in these mountains as well as anywhere else, for you know he tempted our Saviour on a mountain."

"My good old friend, you seem to have been long a pilgrim to the heavenly country."

"For forty years," said he, "I have found that the Lord has been good to me, and that he who trusts in the Saviour shall never be moved."

"But are you never tempted to forsake the Saviour?"

"I know that my heart is very deceitful, and Satan keeps trying to get old Moses; but my master in heaven says, 'By grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.' This is my hope, that he who has begun the good work will finish it. When you plant corn, Massa, you don't go away and leave it, and let the birds pull it up, or the grass and the weeds kill it; so when God plants the good seed in the sinner's heart, he does not go away and leave it to die."

"You say you are tempted sometimes?"

"Yes, Massa, sometimes the devil will come and whisper in my ear,—Moses, you serve a hard Master; he sends

sickness, and poverty, and trouble; he sends the fly and kills all your wheat; but I say—Devil liar—He is no bad Master, for he knocked at the door of my heart, and I would not let Him in; and then He knocked again and again, till I was obliged to open the door, and ever since I have found Him to be good. He has bound up my heart when it was broken; He has come to my bed when I was sick; He has bourned with my sins; He has not cast me off because I was poor and old, and did not love Him so much as I ought; and then He died for poor Moses's soul. Oh no, he is not a bad Master. He may take away my wife and children; He may burn my house, and lay me on a sick bed, and smite me with his own dear hand; still I would love Him, and say it was all for good."

As he said this, a silent tear stole down his cheek. I could not help saying to myself, "What would I give for such tears, and for such heavenly love and gratitude as seems to dwell in the heart of this pious old negro!"

"You have preaching here, I suppose."

"Yes," said he, "and sometimes, when I go to preaching, my heart feels cold and dead; but then the minister preaches so good, that my soul gets happy, and then the Bible preach, and the words preach, and everything preach; and when my hand is at the plough, my soul is in heaven."

"You have a Bible, then?"

"Yes, I have; I learned to read thirty years ago, and now when it rains all day on Sunday, I read, and sing, and pray, and find that Jesus Christ can come to the ugly cabin of poor Moses."

I bade the old man farewell, with the confident hope of meeting him in heaven. I afterwards learned that he was remarkable punctual in attending Divine worship, and was considered by the congregation to which he belonged, to be a very pious man.

SOLEMN AND EVENTFUL QUESTION.

An old Congregational minister of the gospel, just closing the 77th year of his age, who is engaged in preparing a book for publication in the city of New York, has been in the habit, for a short time past, of dining at a coffee-house, where, at that hour of the day, uniformly a company of more or less sober gentlemen, of various ages, were engaged in a kind of game at a table in the middle of the room, merely for pastime, without bet or wrangling among them. On the last day of September, at noon, there were but two at the game, one younger man from Europe, and a man upwards of sixty years of age, who pleasantly busied themselves in their mode of pastime, while the old minister was taking his mid day repast. A thought came into his mind on the precious value of time, which was so often wasted as though it was good for nothing. This led him at the close of his repast to step to their table, and put the following question to the gentlemen at their play: "What value would you set upon sixty minutes of time if you could be assured that this, and this one hour only, were allotted you to seek and secure an eternal interest in the kingdom of heaven?" They both appeared astonished, but made no definite reply, except a few words by the youngest, who said, "That is a solemn question."

At the coffee-table next day, at noon, that younger man said to the old minister, "Do you remember your question yesterday noon?" "I do," "Well, that old man that was then playing pastime with me, was taken ill in the afternoon, a doctor visited him, and about one o'clock at night he died!"

"Boast not thyself of to-morrow, for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth." The above statement may be relied on as fact. Let the question which was put to those men be considered, estimated, and improved by every waster of precious time, which God has given, to seek and secure an inheritance in the kingdom of heaven. "What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or, what shall a man give for his soul?" Sixty minutes—the last hour of an impenitent sinner's life. What is that hour worth?

JEWISH PRINCIPLE.

The Jews sometimes display lofty principles, which show that the divine light exists among them, although frequently concealed by the old incrustations of Rabbinical institutions. In my own family, and characteristic incident occurred. My worthy grandfather was a man of great sensibility and of a warm heart, but easily excited to wrath. He had a brother whom he dearly loved. One day they fell into a dispute, and each returned to his home in anger. This happened on Friday. As the evening drew near, my good grandmother, who was another Martha, full of activity, began to make preparation for the Sabbath day. "Come, dear Joseph," she exclaimed, "the night is approaching; come and light the Sabbath lamp!"

But he, full of sadness and anguish, continued walking up and down the room. His good wife spoke again in anxiety; "See, the stars are already shining in the firmament of the Lord, and our Sabbath lamp is not yet lighted."

Then my grandfather took his hat and cane, and evidently much troubled, hastened out of the house. But in a few moments he returned with tears of joy in his eyes.

"Now, dear Rebecca," he exclaimed; "now I am ready."

He repeated his prayer and with gladness lighted the Sabbath lamp. Then he related the dispute which had occurred in the morning, adding: "I could not pray and light my lamp before becoming reconciled with my brother Isaac."

"But how did you manage to do it so soon?"

"O," he replied, "Isaac had been as much troubled as I was; he could not begin the Sabbath either, without becoming reconciled with me. So we met in the street; he was coming to me, and I was going to him, and we ran into each other's arms and wept."

Might not we end this anecdote with those simple words of Jesus, "Go and do likewise?"

There is a poor woman living but a few miles from Dover, who pays annually \$15 for missions, \$15 for the support of the gospel in her own place, and has also taken a poor boy to support and educate, whom she hopes and prays that God will make a missionary. "God loveth the cheerful giver."

THE CHURCH!

WHAT is the Church?—Thou City of our God,
From whose high towers we mark the heavenly road,
Thy light divine, reveals a pilgrim race,—
Alien on earth, but heirs of heavenly grace.
While traveling onward in the living ray
Of that bright sun, whose glory makes their day,—
Light in His light, truth from His vital beams,
Through all their weary way, resplendent streams.
The paths of penitence and faith are there,
The paths of love and duty, praise and prayer.
Each nook, where, knit in unity of love,
Saint cling to saint and all to God above:
Each outward ordinance in mercy given,
Each outward grace that fits the soul for Heaven,—
All, all that man can need, or God reveal
To guide to heaven the souls redeem'd from hell,—
Lie clear and plain from Zion's holy tower,
When Christ her Sun shines forth in light and life and power.

What is the Church?—Alas! a dangerous height,
To him who climbs it wrapt in Nature's night,
Trusting in Reason's lamb; whose lustre streams
Cold and uncertain, as the moon's pale beams,—
As, calm and beautiful,—as, false and fair,—
On all beneath, her lights and shadows bear.
Now lovely glimpses of the real and true
Stand clearly out to meet the ravish'd view;
Anon some lurid cloud obscures the scene,
Some dark'ning error,—prompt to intervene;
While o'er the changeful landscape,—worst of all—
The shadow of "the Church" is made to fall:
Our loved and holy Church!—dark as a funeral pall.

O Thou, who didst of old Thy Spirit shower
Upon thy Church with Pentecostal power,
Descend on every heart, and make us see
The Church but precious, as she guides to Thee!
Chase the dark night, the cold, uncertain ray;
Shed o'er her towers the light and life of day.
Show forth the true, the heaven-appointed road,
To bring our souls to glory and to God.
Enlighten'd and renew'd by warmth Divine.—
Thou Sun of Righteousness! arise and shine.

MIRACLE IN THOSE DAYS.

The following anecdote was related at the Congregational Association, at Pittsfield, by Rev. Mr. Ellis:

He went recently, he said, four miles before breakfast, in Franklin, to see John Colby, 89 years old, who had lived till 86 an infidel. He then fell into great distress of mind and was impressed as with a voice from heaven—"Go to the Bible." "Go to the Bible?—why have never learned to read." But he went and learned to read by slow process from the first elements, and obtained a Christian hope, to the wonder of his neighbors, and the vexation of his wife and family. Daniel Webster, hearing of the facts, visited his early acquaintance. "John," said he, "what is this I hear of you?" "O, Daniel," he replied, "your are a great man; you make laws in Congress; but this book contains better laws than what you make." He returned to his tenant's house from the interview much impressed and very thoughtful. He was inquired of with solicitude, "Mr. Webster, what is the matter with you, are you sick?" "Ah, Taylor," said Mr. Webster, "there are miracles in these days—John Colby is converted."

COSTLY PLEASURE.

Some few years since, an orthodox clergyman, in one of our New England cities, felt a strong desire to read Walter Scott's novels. And he so far sacrificed his principles that he made up his mind to do so. For several successive Sabbaths he supplied his pulpit by means of exchange, and employed his time as proposed.

Having finished his fearful work he found to his great surprise, that he had brought leanness on his soul. Some one remarked, "He will not get over it for months, and perhaps not even for years." "No," said the late Prof. Stuart, "nor to all eternity."

PRAYER.

God has made man an instrument to man, and we may not despise a brother's kindness; but we can seldom tell him our whole case; how, then, can he give an opinion upon it? There is something exceedingly satisfactory and delightful to me in dealing with an omniscient and infallible Being. The Scriptures seem to take particular pains to present that Being with more than a father's heart. While the prodigal was yet a great way off—naked and fin rags, the fruit of his own folly—his father, ran, and felt, on his neck and kissed him, and bid him welcome to the best fare of his house. While we stand in the ante-chamber, and talk with the servants, we may meet with many a rude repulse, fair promises, and bitter disappointments. It is better to go at once to the foot of the throne, without any introduction, and there lay our grievances. There never was, nor never will be, an instance of rejection. "He that cometh shall in no wise be cast out"—Author of a Father's Reason for Repose.

TOBACCO SMOKING.

The practice of tobacco smoking was introduced by Sir Walter Raleigh, about 1586. Its use, however, like that of coffee, encountered much opposition. Laws and severe penalties were enacted against it. The Grand Duke of Moscow forbade its entrance into his territory, under pain of the knot for the first offence, and death for the next.—The emperor of the Turks, the king of Persia, and Pope Urban VIII., all issued similar prohibitions. A hundred volumes were written against it, and even King James I., took up his pen to suppress it. He styles it, "a custom loathsome to the eye, hateful to the nose, painful to the brain, dangerous to the lungs, and in the black, stinking fume thereof, most nearly resembling the horrible Stygian smoke of the pit that is bottomless."