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SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES: WHY?

By N. H. D. Wilson.

There is no book which has such a sale as the Bible. It is a conservative calculation that the daily sale of the Word of God reaches 40,000 volumes. Published in 492 versions, it is now found in every land. God speed the day when it shall be the guide of every pilgrim, the light of every home, the comfort of every sorrowing heart!

But is it studied? By many; yes. By most, not at all, or so desultorily as to have but little opportunity to confer blessing. Therefore it may not be amiss to enforce through the Advocate some great reasons why we should "Search the Scriptures." The word "search" is the figure of the miner who digs deep in the bowels of the earth, brings forth the ore, crushes and washes or burns it to separate the hidden gold. Why should each one not simply read, but "Search the Scriptures." In this article I shall not emphasize the duty but rather point out the privilege.

(1) Awakening China, desirous of learning the secret of Western civilization, has required every candidate for a degree and, therefore, for an office (for only the literate hold office) to study the Bible. What the heathen nation demands of its ruling class, America's rulers, ourselves, should demand of ourselves, and more, a thorough knowledge of that Book which lies at the very foundation of the law, government, society and life of our own and of our mother nation.

(2) A literary reason. Every authority on style I have read, places first in the list of those books which have created the best English style and which, when studied, will contribute most to the formation in the individual writer, of a pure, elegant, forceful perspicuous style the Bible. The great English and American orators, have ever been students of its language, this "well of English undefiled."

(3) But far higher, though short of the highest, a moral reason. The great infidel gave instructions that his daughter be taught the Bible. A speaker in a convention of agnostics, urges the study of the Bible as "the greatest classic of conduct, the legacy of a people with a sublime passion for righteousness." With no fuller faith, nor higher idea than ethical culture, every wise man will "Search the Scriptures" as the most inspiring teacher of moral truth and the ever-springing fountain of moral life.

(4) But the next step brings us from the twilight of dawn into the sunlight of noon: it is our Father's Word of Life to us. How precious to me are the few fragments of letters in that strange angular writing wherewith my own sainted father used to address his name-sake. How gladly would I gather for study the wealth of love and wisdom which foolish youth thoughtlessly destroyed! But this Book is my Father's letter of love and wisdom to me his child. Can I neglect it?

(5) But surpassing wealth, "it testifies of me," saith Christ. Who would not travel far to study the masterpiece of painting or sculpture wherein is best interpreted the beauty of woman or the strength of man? Herein is the portrait of the life of One who is the fairest among ten thousand and altogether lovely, and in whom are blended past separation or distinction, the purity of God, and the tenderness of man. Masterpiece of the eternal matchless Master! Yet the holding of Raphael's Madonna conveys not beauty, nor may the marble of Praxiteles give strength, but he who by searching the Scriptures gazes on the Son is changed from glory to glory, reflecting His beauty and being filled with His strength.

(6) Finally, lest the reader be exhausted, the subject is well nigh exhaustless, "in them ye think ye have eternal life." Whence came the clear star of hope which cheered your darkest hour? Why do we "hope to meet our Pilot face to face when we have crossed the bar?" Is this

assurance born of philosophy? A few of earth's great ones have argued for our hope, but trembled as they hoped. Of heathen religions? Where they borrow from the Word, they weaken by foolish admixture of impossibilities. Where they know not the Word, they are hopelessly ignorant. From poetry? It but sings what it hath here learned. Nay, if there is any "Summer Land," any "Land o' the Leal," any "Home of the Soul," any "My Father's House of Many Mansions," we know it only through the Word of this Book, and we may reach it only as this Book is a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our path.

For these reasons, reader, as thou lovest thy soul, or thy mind, I charge thee, 'Search the Scriptures.'

RURAL EVANGELIZATION.

By Rev. R. M. Archibald, Birmingham, Ala., in *Go Forward*.

To speak of mere rural evangelization in the sense of preaching the Gospel, making converts, and getting them into the church is not enough. Emotional preaching has often aroused the people for a time and brought large numbers into the church; but the work has not always been abiding. The day in which we could be content with the holding of revivals and filling the church with members has passed; we must train our membership for service in the church rather than merely convert and initiate them. This paper will, therefore, deal with the matter of developing rather than that of technically evangelizing the rural section.

There are many country circuits composed of intelligent, liberal, loyal, and prosperous people and constituting some of our most desirable pastoral charges. Our purpose shall be not to consider these, but rather those in the less favored sections, where conditions may be regarded as problematical.

Two facts urge the necessity of our giving due attention to this work:

(1) The rural section is a part of the great world field, the harvest from which our Lord has sent out His disciples to gather. Our Lord's order was: "Jerusalem, all Judea, Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."

(2) There is a constant influx of people from the country into the cities. Most of the sound business men and church leaders in our cities and our preachers everywhere are country-born. There are many poor, backward, and ignorant country neighborhoods about which we often speak disparagingly; and yet, when we look at many of our preachers and substantial laymen, we are forced to say: "This man was born there." Neglect the country, and where will our preachers come from? Stop this stream of pure fresh blood that constantly flows from the country into the city, and the city problem will be multiplied many fold; allow that same stream to become putrid and corrupting, and the conditions resulting would become well-nigh intolerable.

The most powerful of all forces in rural development is the pastor. Here he finds his greatest opportunity. No one can so effectively touch and influence the people as he. His coming is looked forward to with much interest, and his words linger (if he says anything worth remembering) long after he is gone. He is often quoted as authority on any matter about which he speaks. The hurry and bustle of the city is lacking, and he has plenty of time to do his work well. He can see all the members of the family in his pastoral visits; work is often suspended, and he may be entire master of the situation.

Many churches have mongrel song-books or an inadequate supply of our own, when, by a judicious effort on the part of the pastor, our hymnal and Sunday-school song-books could be easily supplied. The rural pastor should preach a strong, virile, stimulating, aggressive gospel instead of appealing to the emotional, as he is often tempted to do.

In his pastoral work he should not only comfort the saints, but get in touch with the young people, and by any and all means encourage them to lives of useful service. He should be constantly on the lookout for bright, promising boys and girls, put stimulating literature in their hands, and get them off to college. No one can better feed our church schools than the rural pastor; and in so doing he not only revolutionizes a life, but often an entire family.

Another means of developing the country work is the circulation of suitable books. Every rural pastor should be a traveling colporteur if he would make the best of his opportunity. The big dailies and popular magazines are not so common; there is less to distract, more time for reading, and usually less to read in the country than elsewhere.

The developing of leaders is often the most difficult of the pastor's duties; but if the above suggestions are carried out, it is not so difficult after all. This can better be done by keeping the same man longer on a pastoral charge. The average preacher should stay from two to four years.

It is useless to say that strong and well-equipped men should be sent to the rural charges. I know of one section that for a number of years has been served by supplies who were local in their views, or, for the most part, by young men on trial and changing every year until Methodism is all but ready to leave the field. Within eight years some seven churches have become defunct within a radius of twenty miles; and it now looks as if several others are headed the same way. Let us by all means send strong men to the rural charges.

What the rural churches need is the missionary spirit. Many have been helped and ministered unto without learning the lesson of ministering until they have become pauperized and, in some cases, dead. No church will die that has the missionary spirit, nor will one fail of development.

Give every wise, consecrated pastor that uses well every opportunity afforded him and makes his charge a center of missionary activity, and practically all problems of rural evangelization will find their solution.

CHURCH EXTENSION NOTES.

As a rule, a church applies for aid but once in its history. It is not difficult, therefore, to understand why these applicants expect to receive the amount granted as soon as the conditions are met. A vast amount of the correspondence in this office is occasioned by the necessity for an explanation at this point.

We are now approaching the annual meeting, which will be held at St. Joseph, Mo., May 6th to 10th. As soon as the grants are made, the churches will begin to demand the money, and we cannot pay a dollar until the money is received from the assessment now upon the church.

Will not the pastors see to it that the Church Extension assessment has an equal showing with other claims, and remit same to their Conference Board Treasurers or to this office on the earliest possible date? The official receipt upon which we receive all Church Extension Funds will answer every purpose in settling, at the session of your Annual Conference, with the Treasurer of your Conference Board, your Conference Teller, your Statistical Secretary, or any one else concerned in the matter.

It takes more than a stock of pious phrases on the tongue to keep the heart from starvation.

He only is a true liberal who is more anxious that others should be free than he should be without restraint.