

# THE BIBLICAL RECORDER AND SOUTHERN WATCHMAN.

DEVOTED TO RELIGION, MORALITY, LITERATURE AND GENERAL INTELLIGENCE. T. Meredith, Editor.

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## FAMILY READING—THE BIBLE.

BY DR. HUMPHREY.

It is taken for granted, that the Bible will be read morning and evening, accompanied with other devotional exercises, in every Christian family. That our children should be taught from their earliest years to listen to it as the word of God, all but open infidels will agree. But on the question whether the sacred volume ought to be used as a reading book, either in the family, or the school, there is not the same unanimity of opinion. Some parents are afraid, that if it is read by their children, for any other than strictly religious purposes, they will lose their reverence for it; that it will be brought down, in their estimation, to a level with the writings of uninspired men, and that thus, the great object of it, as a divine revelation, will be defeated. This will depend, I think, almost entirely upon the parent or teacher. If you show but little more reverence for the Bible yourself, than for any common book, and merely put it into the hands of your children as an entertaining history, or as furnishing some of the best lessons for improvement in the art of reading, they will of course be very apt to lose sight of its sacredness. But it would be extremely illogical to infer, on this account, that it is not safe to use as a family reading book. If your children see that you yourself regard the Scriptures as the oracles of the living God, if when you put these "lively oracles" into their hands, you exhort them to receive the gift, as from the "Father of lights;" and if by suitable remarks, you keep this in their remembrance afterwards, what danger is to be apprehended, from that familiarity with the sacred volume against which the objection is supposed to lie. If it is infinitely better than any other book, ought not our children to read it more than they do any other, that every part of it may be familiar to their minds, and that they may be able to turn to any passage without the help of a lexicon?

But the more fully to test the validity of such an objection, let us appeal to facts. Is there less reverence for the Bible, in families where it is read a great deal, on week days as well as on the Sabbath, than in any other families? Do fewer children of the former become pious, than the latter? No, God blesses his own truth, by fastening it upon the memory and the conscience, though the individual is often, at the commencement, unconscious of the process which is going on within him. In regard to the corruptions of Christianity, and the various forms of heathenism, there can be no question. The church of Rome understands this matter perfectly. Though she does not allow the Scriptures to be read in the family, or the school, she puts her breviary, her legends and her traditions into the hands of all the children of her communion, at the tenderest age. These they are taught, to regard as sacred, they consult their *only* reading; and what is the consequence? Do they reject the Romish faith, because the books in which it is taught are always before them? On the contrary, they drink it in with their mother's milk, and ever after adhere to it with a tenacity which might well make multitudes of Protestants blush for their own instability. What other reading book have the great body of the Mohammedans, either in their families or their schools, but the Koran? And does familiarity with their Bible shake the faith of their children in the truth of its absurdities and blasphemies? Every body knows that it has the contrary effect. It binds them to the religion of the false prophet for ever. So among the Hindus and the Chinese. Their sacred books are their most familiar reading books; and it is this influence more than any thing else, perhaps, that holds them in the most deplorable, intellectual and spiritual bondage, from generation to generation. Why then should the Holy Scriptures, the word of the one living and true God, have diametrically the opposite effect upon the minds of our children, if we make them more familiar with it, in their tender years, than with any other book? The objection, I am sure, cannot be maintained on any fair ground of argument or experience.

It may assist us to estimate the value of the Bible, as a family reading book, if before we look at it as a divine revelation, we suppose it to have been found half a century ago, somewhere in Judea, and to have come into our hands merely as an authentic historical record of past ages. Viewed in this light, it would be invaluable, for it is the oldest history in the world. It carries us back to the beginning of time, and gives us the only rational account of the creation and primitive state of the world, and of the origin of all things. It tells us how and where the true golden age began, when "the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy;" and how suddenly and darkly it ended, when our first parents ate the forbidden fruit and were driven out of Eden. From the apostasy, it brings us down through a period of sixteen hundred years, to the general deluge; tells us how the world was

re-peopled by the family of Noah, and then, in connection with the history of God's chosen people, tells us of Egypt, and Babylon, and Nineveh, and Tyre; of the four great monarchies also, and of those ruthless conquerors, who successfully trod down the nations as the mire of the street. Herodotus is allowed by common consent to be the father of profane history, because he first collected the materials, and gave them the form of authentic narrative. All before him was fable, tradition, wild conjecture, and the most revolting mythological absurdity. But Herodotus flourished only 430 years before Christ, so that the Bible was the only history in the world on which the least reliance could be placed for more than 3,500 years after the creation, that is, during much more than half the period since "the foundation of the earth was laid!" Would not this single circumstance entitle it to be received and read in our families, if it had no other recommendation?

But where else can we find such pure morality—such masterly geographical sketches of good men and of bad men—such dissections of the human heart—such examples of all that is tender, and lovely, and elevated on the one hand, and of all that is malignant and diabolical on the other? Where else can we look for such exquisite poetry, such rich stores of didactic wisdom, and so many transcendent examples of the sublime and beautiful? Surely it were impossible to read such a book as this too much, or to give it too high a place in the family library, even if it were not inspired.

What shall we say, then, when we consider, that the authors of this book "spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Ghost;"—that it is the only written revelation of the mind and will of God, that this world has ever received, or ever will receive—that it is the only infallible rule of human faith and practice—the only volume in which "life and immortality are brought to light?" Shall we not read it? Shall we not recommend it to our children as above all price, and show them how much we value it, by having it read more than any other book in our families? In this respect, there has been a sad falling off within my own recollection. The Bible is not read half so much in religious families, as it was thirty years ago. In two many cases, it is all but supplanted, even on the Lord's day, by religious story books and other light readings, which it would be a misnomer to call religious, even in the most liberal sense of the term. Formerly, as soon as children could read in easy lessons, the Bible was put into their hands, to be read through in a given time, and then to be received as a present.

The first reading was generally finished in a year; and it was not uncommon for children to go through with both Testaments, three or four times before they were a dozen years old. In this way, they almost committed large portions of the Scriptures to memory; and many have been heard to bless God, as they were ripening for heaven in old age, that their minds were in this way so early enriched with his sacred truth. But now the *gift* of the sacred volume is first in order, and if a few of our children read it through once, in the course of two or three years, it is regarded as a great achievement; while the great majority, if they undertake the task at all, relinquish it before it is half accomplished. Indeed, I am afraid it would be found, upon strict inquiry, that a great many children of adult age in Christian families, and even some professors of religion among them, never read the *whole* Bible through in their lives. And if they never did it is probable that they never will. Indeed there are Christian parents who begin to doubt whether some parts of the Bible ought to be read at all by their children, on the score of modesty. I am free to admit, that incomprehensible as the English version is, there are some words and phrases which have become objectionable, by long and vulgar use. But let us beware that we do not carry the objection too far. Every one who believes "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God," must allow that whatever change is desirable in the language, the meaning, the ideas, ought to be retained; and who will contradict the apostle, or rather the Spirit of God, by saying that all Scripture is not "profitable," though it may be inspired? He who gave us the Bible, the *whole* Bible, knew perfectly well "what was in man," and understood all the topics which were needful to make it just such a book as we want. It may be therefore, that the very passages which are objected to, are calculated, when read under the direction of a judicious parent, to guard the child against the most perilous seductive influence to which he may be exposed, and to strengthen the principle of virtue within him. We may "wrest the Scriptures to our own destruction," at any period of life; but it were impious to look upon this as the natural and necessary tendency of any part of God's Holy Book; and I have no doubt that some young persons have been made infidels by the religious fastidiousness of which I have just been speaking. "Can that be the word of God," they have been ready to ask "which our parents do not think fit for us to read; and if these parts are not inspired, who knows but that the whole is a forgery?" For myself, I think it infinitely the safest way to take the Bible as it is, and hand it over to my children, as a "light to their feet and a lamp to their path."

But in recommending the sacred volume as a family reading book, I have much more in view, than merely giving it to children, and requiring them to read so many chapters daily, till it is finished. I know not how any parent can spend a part of his leisure time more profitably to himself, and to those whom he most tenderly loves, than by sitting down with them and going over the history of the creation, of the fall, of the flood, of Abraham, of Joseph, of the plagues of Egypt, of the deliverance of Israel and their forty years' sojourn in the wilderness, of Samuel and David, and all the kings, of Daniel, and Paul, and John, and above all, of Jesus Christ—as his incarnation, life, miracles, doctrines, death, resurrection and ascension are drawn out in the four gospels. This, as every one knows, is but a glance at the rich and inexhaustible treasures of "wisdom and knowledge" in the Holy Scriptures. Nothing is easier than to interest the minds of children, at the

tenderest age, in Biblical history and biography. It does not require superior learning, or talents.—Good sense and a warm heart will enable any parent, with the help of which he may easily avail himself, to make the Scriptures the most profitable, as well as one of the most engaging books in the world, for family reading. Biblical history, however, it will occur to every one, ought, like profane history, to be read with a good atlas spread out upon the table for constant reference. Is it the ark resting upon Ararat, your children will want to know where it is situated. Is it the journey of the children of Egypt to Canaan; through what waters and countries did they pass? Is it Babylon; where was it situated, and what kind of a city was it? And so of every thing else, the blooming group around you, will be vastly more interested and profited by seeing where the patriarchs and apostles lived, and where the events recorded in the Bible transpired, than they could be without the maps. I have only room to add, that the more familiarly you can refer to ancient manners, customs, &c., the better will your children understand the Scriptures.

From the Presbyterian.

## NARRATIVE ON THE STATE OF RELIGION Within the bounds of the Presbyterian Church, as submitted to the General Assembly, May, 1839.

Christian Brethren—The object of this narrative which is annually addressed to you by the General Assembly, is to put you in possession of a summary of the state of religion in the Presbyterian Church. Such a sketch must necessarily be imperfect, not only from the extent of the subject, and the very concise terms of these narratives, but from the nature of religious influence. Much of this influence lies beyond our reach, belonging rather to the secrets of the heart, and the deep things of God. We should also bear in mind, even where its effects can be traced, the progress of Christianity is not to be measured by its direct results alone. The indirect influences of religion, as they blend with all the relations of man, are frequently the most important, and they elude our search they constantly operate, and with silent pace, change the character and institutions of men, prepare the way for the gospel, and deeply affect the destiny of distant generations.

Besides the above there are also other influences of Christianity, which ought not to be overlooked in a narrative of this sort. For example, the loss of doctrinal purity may be as fatal to religion among a people, as the prevalence of open immorality. To restore to a people in such circumstances, by effective and proper means, a controversy, is a great triumph of the Gospel, and lies in fact at the root of all true religion. Yet the conversion of men to God may not appear among its immediate effects.

Again, the order of the house of God is an essential part of his true worship, of the right government of the church, and the efficient propagation of the Gospel. To preserve that order unimpaired, or to restore it when disturbed, is, therefore a great duty of the Church of God, as the pillar and ground of the truth. The history of the Presbyterian Church, for several years past, affords a striking illustration of the above remarks. The result of these controversies, about our doctrines and our order, by which we have been so long agitated, form an essential part of the state of religion in our beloved Church. After a painful and protracted contest, God has granted us deliverance and peace. The truth has triumphed, the Church has been purged of error, our ecclesiastical order and our venerable institutions, sometimes almost threatened with extinction, have been rescued and re-established with new sanctions. The great charities of the Church have been increased in number, and strengthened in character, and we are now prepared, by the grace of God, in a manner hitherto unknown, to maintain and extend the Gospel of Christ.

It is a matter for devout acknowledgment to God, that we have seldom more enjoyed the manifest tokens of God's gracious presence in the midst of the churches, than during the season of trial and agitation through which we have passed. The house of God, like the ancient temple, may "be built in troublous times." In no previous year have our ecclesiastical Boards been more abundantly prospered; finding favor with the people, and daily growing more useful and efficient; especially is this true in regard to Domestic and Foreign Missions. An unusual number of new churches has been organized during the year. In the destitute places, the call for the preached word has daily waxed louder. In the churches generally, the people of God have been confirmed in their attachment to the distinguishing doctrines of our venerable standards. More attention has been paid to prayer meetings, to religious education, and to the means of grace in general. We are also permitted to recount a special work of grace in the Presbyteries of New York, Long Island 2d, New Brunswick, South Carolina, Georgia, Flint River, Tuscaloosa, Steubenville, Tombeckbee, and Louisville.—Some remarkable examples are reported of conversions in the Sabbath-school, and large additions have been made to the churches. Besides these special manifestations of divine grace, the Presbyteries generally report more than usual attention to religion among the people at large, larger additions to the communion of the Church, and an evident increase of liberality and of the spirit of missions, with many kindred facts indicating the pleasing progress of the Gospel.

One subject of peculiar interest in the history of the year, is the religious instruction of the children of the Church. This all important duty is evidently receiving a more deep and general attention from pastors and parents, as well as from that noble army of youthful laborers, who have devoted themselves to the instruction of

Sabbath-schools. Our hopes of success in spreading the Gospel, rest under God, in a large measure on the religious education of the world in its infancy. This is a work so simple, so practical, so sublime, that it ought largely to enlist the prayers and labors of all the people of God.—With the Bible in her hands, interpreted by our admirable standards, and carried down to the fountain of life, by the universal instruction of her children, the Church would be irresistible. At this age of impression, the knowledge of the Lord should be imparted to every child that lives. We are happy to add that a committee has been appointed by the General Assembly at its present sessions, with instructions to digest a plan to be laid before all our churches.

In connexion with this subject, we mention with peculiar pleasure, the growing attention of our brethren in many parts of our land to the oral religious instruction of the slaves. The wisdom and fidelity with which it has been conducted, the general approbation which their labors have received, and the success attending them, mark an era in the work of Domestic Missions, and should encourage our brethren largely to enter upon this open and interesting field. We cannot here forbear to extract a part of the report from the Presbytery of Georgia.

"We are happy to say, in regard to the religious instruction of negroes, that this important part of our service has received a new impulse during the last year. This business receives considerable attention in many parts of our bounds. Plantations are open to all our ministers, and fields presented among this people, which it is impossible for them to occupy. Sabbath-schools for their exclusive benefit exist in some of our churches, and we are happy to believe, that there is an increasing interest felt on this subject. Within our bounds there is one minister, whose whole ministry is devoted exclusively to this people, and most, if not all, the settled pastors and stated supplies preach as often as once a week to this class of our population, and in Liberty county, there is at this time very considerable attention to religion among the blacks—not less than fifty being under serious impressions."

We only add that a beloved brother in Augusta, and another in the vicinity of Natchez, are following the noble example recorded in the above extract, by devoting their whole time to this interesting work.

On the subject of intemperance, our reports are various, and on the whole indicate no change or progress worthy of special notice. But there is one aspect of this subject which ought not to be lost sight of. Several of our State legislatures have with noble intrepidity, laid their strong hands on this national hydra. The enlightened legislation of Tennessee and Mississippi in particular, against this enormous evil, has attracted the attentions of the nation, and exceedingly cheered and aided the friends of temperance.

Amidst many mercies for which we have so much reason to rejoice and to bless God, we have to record the reiterated complaints by the Presbyteries, of the frequent profanation of the Lord's day; of the spirit of speculation and worldliness which is often found even in the bosom of the Church; of the American sin, as it may be emphatically called; viz. of the insubordination of the youth of our land. For these and all other sins it becomes us deeply to humble ourselves at the throne of God, and to deprecate the wrath to which they deservedly expose us. Thus, Christian brethren, we have in a few words recited to you the history of the ecclesiastical year, which has now drawn to its close.

In concluding this narrative, we venture to suggest that in the new and solemn circumstances of our Church, we ought to rejoice with trembling to take care that we properly improve the events by which we have been so much favored, to the greater glory of God; and to prove the sincerity and supremacy of our love for the truth by its universal diffusion. The word of God is not bound. Let it have free course, that it may run and be glorified. We can no longer derive apologies for our inactivity, from divided councils, intestine commotions, or conflicting interests.—We enjoy the unity of the spirit in the bonds of peace. Our trials have passed away. The opening field of the world invites us. All things are ready, and the stumbling blocks have been taken out of our way. If our doctrines and order should now lose their efficacy in our hands; if our ecclesiastical organizations should now languish, and our zeal now be permitted to expire, we shall meet the due reward of our sins, in the desertion of God, and the execration of all men. Christian brethren, "we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak." Let us arise in the might of God to do a great work for the glory of the Lord, and the salvation of the world.

The peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

J. L. WILSON, Mod.

## THE DOOM OF THE CORNER.

Close of Dr. Bedell's last sermon.

If there is on earth any one thing which is more difficult to sustain than another, it is the accusation of a man's own conscience. Poverty may be borne, calumny borne, affliction of any kind borne, but the mental anguish of consciously deserved distress is intolerable. I have no doubt that it is in relation to his own eternal self reproaches, that one portion of the sufferings of the eternal world, is placed before the world under the characteristic term of "the worm which dieth not." Yes, scorners—careless, impenitent sinners—rejecter of Jesus Christ neglecter of his great salvation, you are now nursing the undying worm of self reproach which must of its nature be more bitter and of anguish more

intense than the unconsuming fire of eternal wrath. There are fearful questions in the word of God—"Who can dwell with devouring flames? who can lie down in eternal burnings?" But there is still a more fearful question,—who can bear eternal self-upbraidings? There is a fearful declaration, "that for those who reject the salvation of the Gospel there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin;" but it is still more fearful to know that for such there remaineth no escape from the more than devouring flame, the scorpion sting of self-recrimination. It were terrible to hear, in the great day of judgment from the lips of the Judge, "thou hast destroyed thyself;" but it is more unspeakably, more inconceivably terrific, to possess the eternal consciousness of having done that deed of self-destruction.

My dear brethren, all this is what the sinner is preparing for himself. Your sins you bear, with none to take from your soul the weight of wrath which rests upon it. Your sorrows you bear, with no almighty comforter. The scorn of heaven you bear, and the scorn of hell, and worse than all. In what a contemptible light he regards the transient sips of joy, for which the children of sensuality forego their everlasting interest, when, like Adam, they sell paradise for an apple! For one morsel of meat they renounce a birth-right, as Esau, or taste, with Jonathan but a little honey, and for it they must die. His pleasures, not being of the sensual kind, fill not his cheeks with blushing; nor his heaviness the end of his mirth. He eats not only the food of angels, but the bread of God. The lines are fallen to him in pleasant places, and he has a goodly heritage. The greater an epicure he is, so much the more temperate. His pleasures neither darken his understanding, nor stupify his conscience, nor take away his heart. It is his alone to find honey without stings, and roses void of thorns. Take to yourselves, he says, your paradise of fools, and your impure delights; serve your divers lusts and pleasures, all ye that are in the flesh, but "I delight to do thy will, O God; thy law is in the midst of my heart."—Away with the weeping food of Egypt, the onions and the garlic. Welcome thou, heavenly manna! Hail, ye everlasting joys, which do not resemble the cracking of thorns under a pot; but the cheerful light of the sun that shineth more and more until the perfect day! It is yours alone not to be blasted by sickness, or ripped by the winter of adversity; and even in death you shall flourish like the palm-tree, and pass into eternity.—*Mc Ewen.*

## THE STILTS.

A foolish son is a grief to his father, and bitterness to her that bare him. Prov. xvii. 25.

Little boys think they know more than older people. When their parents tell them to take care, they think there is no danger. In this way children are often hurt. They are foolish, and will not do as they are bidden. Always mind what your parents tell you; they know a great deal more than you.

Do you see those boys walking about on stilts? They feel very great, because the stilts lift them up. They are as tall as men. Children like to seem tall and manly. I wish they were as fond of being good.

Paul's mother said to him, Paul, come here, Paul came to his mother, and she said, My son, you are too little to be getting up on high stilts. The bigger boys may do so, but I am afraid you will hurt yourself. O no, mother, I am not afraid; I can walk very well on the stilts. His mother said, Paul, you must obey me. Do not try to walk on stilts any more.

Paul bit his lips and hung down his head. He pouted and looked sad. He was angry with his mother. O how wicked! O how unthankful! He forgot how many long nights his poor mother had watched him when he was a sick baby.

Little children, never look sullen and cross at your dear parents. God sees this, and is very much displeased. Love your father and your mother, for this pleases God. Did Paul obey his mother? I will tell you. He went out into the street, and sat upon a large stone. Presently, he saw two boys come by with their stilts. Paul said to himself, I do not care for what mother says. O what a wicked thought! God heard what Paul said in his mind. It is the devil who puts such things into the minds of children. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

Paul did not resist the devil. He was full of wicked thoughts. He ran in and got his stilts. Then he got upon them, and walked about through the gutters, and puddles, and muddy places. At last he saw the other boys tying the stilts fast to their legs, so that they might walk without holding them with their hands. He did so too. Just as he began to walk on them in this way, a large dog ran under him and knocked him down. When they lifted him up, his leg was broken in two places. Children, obey your parents.

Sunday School Friend.

## THE LOVE OF MONEY.

A Methodist preacher of the Ohio conference, states, in the Western Christian Advocate, that in his labors for the missionary cause, he called upon a man who is worth from twelve to fifteen thousand dollars, and requested aid. His reply was, "If we have to pay for it at home and abroad too, it is not worth having; let the heathen get it as we got it." The preacher immediately withdrew the request, and left him to his own reflections.

And how did we get it? Look at the sufferings, labor and death of our Saviour, that we might come into the possession of the gospel and