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ART. I.—*The School: its objects, relations and uses. With a sketch of the education most needed in the United States, the present state of Common Schools, the best means of improving them, and the consequent duties of parents, trustees, inspectors, &c.* By Alonzo Potter, D. D.. Professor of Moral Philosophy in Union College. New York: Harpers. 1842.

THE world is full of good theories and excellent proverbs; and were the sentiments that are universally acknowledged to be just, and which have descended from age to age with the approbation of each, to be condensed in one mass, we should have a volume which the book of inspiration alone would excel. But if this record should appear in the shape of a mercantile account-book, with the practices of men entered on the page which contains their principles, we should in striking the balance, discover a fearful preponderance of the obligations over the credits.

To take a single caption of this imaginary ledger, what maxim is more common-place and threadbare than that the mind is the better part of man, and that the cultivation of its faculties is a higher and nobler object than any that relates to the body alone? Yet when we look at men in society, or catch their conversation, or observe the occupa-

trinal expounding of the scripture; if he has produced no one work which has for its object the development of vital Christianity; let us in justice remember, that he has arrayed himself boldly on the side of unpopular truths; that he has pleaded for the humblest manifestations of genuine faith and zeal; and that he has occasionally stricken such blows at the monster-errors of the age, as have caused them to writhe.

ART. III.—*The Christian's Defence, containing a fair Statement and impartial Examination of the leading objections urged by Infidels, against the Antiquity, Credibility, and Inspiration of the Holy Scriptures: enriched with copious extracts from learned authors.* By James Smith. Two volumes in one. Cincinnati: Stereotyped and published by J. A. James. Pages, Vol. I. 312, Vol. II. 364.

Archibald Alexander

THE Great West is a land of exuberant productions, good and bad. Errors of every species spring up and flourish there, as luxuriantly as the plants which the fertile soil shoots forth in such vigour and abundance. But where poisons abound, there also Providence furnishes effectual antidotes. While men of strong but erratic minds arise, and exert all their talents to propagate errors of the most monstrous kinds, God in mercy to the church raises up other men, who clad in the panoply of truth are qualified to detect, and by sound reasoning and solid learning to refute the dangerous systems of infidelity and heresy, which, from time to time, the enemies of the truth promulgate.

We have been wont to consider the great valley of the Mississippi as a country too new, and too recently settled, to produce any literary works, requiring profound research and extensive erudition; but here we have a volume, or rather two volumes, extending to nearly seven hundred octavo pages, every one of which furnishes evidence of various and extensive reading; and much of it entirely out of the routine of the current literature of the country. Indeed our principal objection to the work before us, is, that it is encumbered with too much learning. The author has sometimes gone out of his way to gather up the fruits of

laborious study, which do not appear to have a very important bearing on the points under discussion. Still we have been greatly gratified to find that there are persons in the west who devote themselves with so much zeal and industry, to the defence of the gospel. While some of our strongest men are occupied in controversies about the cords and pins of the tabernacle, as though the ark itself was in no danger, we rejoice that there are those who apprehend the evils which threaten the church of God from the increase of infidelity and heresy. Another circumstance which affords us real pleasure is, that theological learning appears to be cultivated with so much diligence by some of the ministers of the Cumberland Presbyterian church, to which denomination, it is understood, our author is attached.

The opinion, entertained by many, that ministers of inferior talents and learning will answer well enough for our newly settled countries, is a great mistake. The fact is, that the pioneers who penetrate the wilderness, and are found among the earliest inhabitants of the new territories, are generally men of more than common shrewdness, energy and enterprise. Men of small capacity, and little courage, remain at home, while restless spirits, conscious of vigour, and prepared to endure hardships, are the men who are found on the frontiers; and these are frequently the advocates of erroneous opinions on the subject of religion; or, if they have adopted no system, they are commonly inimical to evangelical truth. When the preacher who is sent to these new settlements is a weak man, or deficient in learning, it affords a triumph to the infidel, and does an injury to the cause which the missionary undertakes to defend. Men of the best abilities are therefore needed in our frontier settlements, more than in the region where every thing is in an orderly, stable condition.

That our readers may have a correct view of the state of religious opinion, in some parts of the west, we will here insert a pretty long extract from the author's preface.

“That the causes which led to this publication, and the objects it is designed to effect, may be properly understood, it is necessary to remark, that in the south-western section of the Union, in which the writer for a number of years has extensively laboured as a minister of the gospel, his observation of the state of society has brought him to the conclusion, that of late years, the progress of infidelity has been great, especially among the better educated young men of the country; who residing, in many instances, far from the restraining influence of parental authority, and the enjoyment of the regular

means of grace, have been peculiarly exposed to be led away by the assertions and sophisms of the adversaries of Christianity. He has also noticed, with pain, that Christians generally, and even many ministers of the gospel, are not conscious of the true state of affairs; in consequence of which, the adversaries have been industriously circulating the writings of Hume, Volney, Taylor, Paine, English, and other infidels, while no efficient efforts have been made to present before the public, in a proper light, the evidences upon which the truth of revelation rests. Under the influence of such views, and knowing from experience, how incompetent unsuspecting young men are to ward off the attacks of infidels, for their special benefit his studies have been directed to the investigation of the nature of the objections urged by infidels against Christianity, and the evidences by which it is supported. In the course of his reading, he has met with many able works, which already demonstrate the claims of the Bible as a revelation from God; yet it has appeared to him that something was still wanting to attract the attention and convince the minds of those who have surrendered their judgment and reason into the hands of Volney, Paine, Olmsted, &c., viz: a fair statement of all the more weighty objections, urged by infidels, with a confutation of each."

We fully concur in the opinion that such a work as is here described is a *desideratum* in our theological literature. And we feel under great obligations to the author for his laborious exertions, but we must be permitted to express some doubt, whether the book under review is the exact thing which is needed. It contains the materials out of which such a work might be composed. But it is by far too voluminous, and will not be read by the persons for whose benefit it is intended; and it comprehends much irrelevant matter; and contains some discussions and statements in which we cannot concur. We regret that the work was so speedily stereotyped. We believe that if it were reduced to one-half, or even to one-third, of the size it now has, every thing truly valuable and pertinent to the design might be included in it. The plan of such a work as we deem necessary would be, to state concisely the objections of infidels, and then to subjoin to each a clear, forcible refutation, leaving out all that is doubtful, or superfluous. There is certainly, in this work, a want of that lucid order, and digested system, which adds very much to the force of reasoning. At the same time that we feel it to be a duty to make such strictures on this learned work, we would again express our admiration of the extensive reading of the author, and our approbation, generally, of his solid answers to infidel objections. In some cases, indeed, we think that he has given importance to trifling ob-

jections, by an elaborate reply, when they should rather have been passed over with a slight notice, or with silent contempt. We are less satisfied with the first sections of the work, than with any of the other parts; and if our opinion could have any weight, we would advise that in future editions, all disquisitions respecting the being of a God and the immateriality of the soul be entirely omitted.

The author informs us that in early life he was himself a deist, led astray by Volney, and Paine; he therefore knows the need there is of such a work as he has attempted to produce: but anxious as he was to see it executed by some masterly hand, he had no idea, he adds, of undertaking it himself, from a sense of his inability to do justice to so important a subject; nor would he ever have attempted the task, had not the dealings of divine Providence, in his estimation, plainly indicated that he should engage in the undertaking.

The circumstances which led him to the conclusion were the following:

“ During the winter of 1839—’40, while upon a tour in the south, the writer visited Columbus in Mississippi, at that period the residence of a very artful and violent enemy of Christianity, Mr. C. G. Olmsted, author of a work, entitled, ‘The Bible its own Refutation’; who, by his easy manners and gentlemanly bearing, had so ingratiated himself with many of the citizens of the place, especially with the young men, as to exercise a most pernicious influence, by the dissemination of his infidel principles. Indeed, he had not only cheated many into the belief that the Bible is an imposition on the credulity of mankind, but he had succeeded to a considerable extent in making the impression, that so conscious were the ministers of the gospel of the weakness of their cause, that no one of any intelligence, would dare, with him, patiently, to discuss the claims of the Bible, as a revelation from heaven. From a sense of duty, the writer determined, for the benefit of the young men of the place, to deliver a series of discourses on the nature and tendency of Infidelity; and another on the Evidences of Christianity. While the former was in progress, he received from a committee of infidel gentlemen, with the sanction of Mr. Olmsted, a written challenge, publicly to discuss, with their champion, the following questions, ‘Were the writers of the different books of the Bible inspired men? Did the facts which they detailed occur? Was Jesus Christ miraculously begotten? Did he perform miracles? Did he rise from the dead?’ Believing, that to decline the proposed discussion, would prove prejudicial to the interests of Christianity, by the advice of religious friends the challenge was accepted. The writer, however, was careful to put off the time of the debate, so as to leave a sufficient opportunity to prepare for the conflict. In the mean time, being far from the necessary facilities, he apprized certain friends in Great Britain of what

was pending, who immediately procured and forwarded to him, every necessary aid.

“Fifteen months after the passage of the challenge, the discussion took place, which continued for nearly three weeks.

“The result, in the opinion of the audience, was favourable to the cause of divine revelation. When the debate was ended, the author received the following testimonial, signed by sixteen of the most respectable men of the town, viz :

“Rev. James Smith. ‘The undersigned having heard the arguments advanced by you to prove the genuineness, credibility and inspiration of the Bible, in the late discussion, between yourself and C. G. Olmsted, Esq., and believing many of your arguments especially those in favour of the credibility and inspiration of the Old Testament, to be entirely new, in this country, and which we judge to be most conclusive and triumphant :—and further believing, that their publication would do much to arrest the poisonous and destructive influence of infidelity, and be calculated to promote Christianity and true patriotism, we respectfully request you to give them to the public, together with your other arguments, which were not delivered, as soon as you can consistently with the difficulties and importance of the task.’”

It may be proper also to add to this testimony, that of some of the editors of periodical papers. The South Western Christian Advocate says, “We found Mr. Smith well prepared for the contest. He had his arguments systematically arranged—had written them all, and read them well. He proved to a demonstration the GENUINENESS, AUTHENTICITY, and INSPIRATION of the Old Testament. His arguments were interesting and convincing. His arguments on the New Testament were equally happy, and if possible more convincing. The conclusion of every inquirer after truth must have been, that the champion of deism was signally defeated, and his cause left bleeding on the field.”

The Union Evangelist remarks, “Every one of unbiassed mind, was left at the close, a firmer and more intelligent believer. Mr. Smith has done much, very much, for the whole Christian church.”

A correspondent of the same paper, who was present, describes the close of the controversy, as follows; “After Mr. Smith had closed his argument on the last night, and returned thanks to the audience, Mr. Olmsted rose, and told the audience that he would occupy much more time than usual, but if there were any that wished to leave he would not think hard of their doing so, but intimated that he expected the friends of truth only to remain. Whereupon the congregation in a crowd, with a few exceptions only, left

the house, and to those, with a few others, who dropped back from the crowd, the old man raved for awhile and then closed."

(Signed) JAMES WALLIS.

Mr. Smith now determined, in compliance with the request made to him, to prepare his arguments for the press; and the present ponderous volume is the result of his indefatigable labours. We are happy to learn that ample encouragement to go on with the publication was soon received; for the subscribers have come in so rapidly, that, as the author informs us, the first edition will not supply more than a tithe of the demands. We rejoice to learn that the book is likely to have so wide a circulation. If it is only read by all who receive it, the benefit will be great; for we are persuaded that it cannot be seriously perused without instruction and profit.

As Mr. Smith has furnished himself so completely with armour, on the right hand and on the left, for this combat with infidelity, let him not leave the field. We would respectfully propose that he devote his remaining years to the defence of the gospel; or, at least, that he spend several years, in travelling from city to city, where infidelity is known to be rampant, delivering in every place a series of lectures. This is the age of lectures; and while so much that is deleterious or useless is thrown out on the public mind, the friends of religion should also avail themselves of this popular vehicle for the dissemination of important truth. Many who are willing to hear a popular lecturer, will never be induced to read any elaborate work on the Evidences of Christianity. There is also a force and impressiveness in truth delivered in the varied and animated tones of the human voice, which is in a great measure lost, when the same sentiments are addressed merely to the eye. The success which attended our author's efforts in the defence of Christianity, at Columbus, should encourage and stimulate him, to proceed in his laudable efforts to arrest the progress of infidelity; an evil worse than any pestilence with which the country has ever been visited. And if our remarks should ever reach his eye, and our opinion have any weight with him, we would earnestly recommend it to him to prepare an abridgement of this work, to occupy not more than one-third or one-half the space, and to re-model and digest into a clearer method the facts and arguments with which it is enriched. We are persuaded that some-

thing of this kind is requisite to give the work that power in opposing infidelity which from the weight of its matter, it should possess.

The objections which Mr. Smith undertakes to answer in this work, are principally taken from Hume, Paine, Taylor, and above all, Olmsted, the person with whom he disputed so successfully, at Columbus. Of the writings of this malignant infidel, we had never heard, until we read this work. He appears to have trodden faithfully in the footsteps of his master Paine, and to have infused into his book all the impiety and blasphemy of that profane enemy of divine revelation. His work as already said is entitled, "The Bible its own Refutation." He appears to have gone over the scriptures from the beginning to the end, reviving all the common infidel objections which have been answered a thousand times: he is perhaps more remarkable for palpable misrepresentation of the facts stated in the Bible, than any one who has gone before him. It was a felicitous circumstance, that our author was led in the providence of God, to engage in controversy with this self-confident infidel; and that in the opinion of all impartial hearers, he was enabled to confute and confound him. There is reason to hope that the result of this debate will have the effect of paralysing the influence of the man and of the book.

In this connexion, we are led to observe, that of all infidel writers, the most blasphemous and extravagant is Robert Taylor. We have had the opportunity of seeing two volumes of his works; and we are seriously of opinion, that they deserve no answer, and need none. A man who can insult the understandings of his readers, by maintaining that there never was any such ancient nation as the Jews, and that such a person as Jesus Christ never existed, no more deserves a serious answer than he who raves in Bedlam. Yet he had followers; and so will every pretender have, however extravagant his opinions, who openly appears as the enemy of righteousness, and the advocate of wickedness. There are men prepared to receive and welcome every form of error, however monstrous, and however absurd. They who hate the truth and love darkness rather than light, are often abandoned to the infatuation of their own deceived minds. The heavy curse of the Almighty has fallen upon them. The apostle Paul describes the character and destiny of such, "And with all deceiva-

bleness of unrighteousness in them that perish, because they received not the love of the truth that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie; that they might be damned who believe not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness." This man, Taylor, was once a preacher in the Established Church of England; he became an apostate, and with a zeal worthy of a better cause, in company with Carlisle, then also an infidel, travelled up and down, through the counties of England, delivering lectures replete with the poison of malignant hatred against Christianity. Many of the declarations, in his books, are so openly blasphemous, that they would pollute any page in which they should be inserted. As we have said, therefore, such impious enemies of the truth, who advance opinions so contrary to all historical evidence, and so unreasonable in themselves, may be left to perish by their own absurdity. Such men cannot be reasoned with; and none will be led away by their pernicious errors, but such as are given over to a reprobate mind.

Many seem to think that the age of infidelity is past, and that the evil produced by such books, as "Paine's Age of Reason" is now merely a matter of history. We are of opinion that this is a great mistake, the entertaining of which is highly injurious to the cause of Christianity; as it lulls the defenders of truth into a false security, and prevents young ministers from arming themselves for the contest, with that care and diligence which are requisite. We regret to be obliged to remark that many young men, who now enter the ministry, are not well qualified to meet the insidious attacks of the infidel; and that when they come into contact with crafty deists, practised in the arts of sophistry and cavil, they are utterly unprepared to do justice to the evidences of divine revelation; so that through their weakness and ignorance, the cause of truth suffers. Mere declamation and denunciation will not answer the purpose. The minds of many, especially of the young, are unsettled on this momentous subject, and they cannot and should not be satisfied without having the evidences of Christianity fairly set before them, and objections solidly answered.

The first volume of this "Defence" is occupied in answering objections to the history recorded in the Old Testament; and the second in maintaining the authority, credi-

bility, and inspiration of the books of the New Testament.

The Mosaic account of the creation had been assailed by Mr. Olmsted, in a most virulent manner, and our author takes up his objections in minute detail, and returns, for the most part, solid answers. The old objections to the chronology of the Bible, and the age of the human family, are brought forward with offensive boldness by this author and by Taylor. A great parade is made about the zodiac found in the temples of Latopolis and Tentyra, two cities in upper Egypt. The latter has been removed from Dendera (the modern name) and is now preserved at Paris. The author shows that this argument, to prove that the temple is older than the world according to Moses, depends on so many uncertain assumptions that it is absolutely worthless; and that while the age of this piece of antiquity is extremely doubtful, it is equally uncertain whether it is a representation of the signs of the zodiac at all. He has also given in a plate, a representation of the supposed zodiac of Dendera.

The objections from facts in geology are also brought forward by these infidels, to discredit the history of Moses. And as, sometime ago, Cuvier and other Christian geologists resorted to the theory that the days, mentioned in the first chapter of Genesis, were not natural days of twenty-four hours, but long periods of time, which some of them supposed might be of six thousand years, Olmsted attacks this theory, and treats it with ridicule. Our author in his defence, adopts this theory; in our opinion, without sufficient reason. Indeed, at present, the most eminent geologists, both in Great Britain and America, have altogether abandoned the theory of demiurgic days, and have embraced the opinion, that Moses does not profess to give the age of the globe of the earth, but only of its preparation for the residence of man, and the chronology of the human family. They hold that there is indubitable evidence, that it must have required many millions of years to form, by the usual process, the successive strata which have been discovered near the surface of the earth; and that Moses only asserts that "In the beginning," whenever that was, "God created the heavens and the earth;" but that there is nothing in his narrative which obliges us to believe, that the body of our earth is no older than the human family. This is not the proper place to discuss the question. We refer to it merely to show that, on both sides, the subject has been argued on

principles which have been for a considerable time abandoned by the most scientific geologists.

It is unnecessary to follow our author through his answers to the numerous and trifling objections made by these vulgar infidels, with whom he has to do. Those objections of Paine, which were of any weight, were long ago well answered by Bishop Watson, in his "Apology for the Bible;" and we are rather surprised that our author, though he uses some of his arguments, so seldom refers to this popular author. In the objections of Taylor and Olmsted we find nothing new; unless it be the impudence with which they bring forward cavils, which have no foundation whatever, but in a perverse misrepresentation of the meaning of the sacred history.

The method pursued by Mr. Smith in defending the New Testament is good, and such as no infidel can successfully resist. He begins with the historical testimonies, so industriously and impartially collected by Lardner. He shows from the testimonies of the Christian fathers, that the most determined enemies of Christianity, in the early ages of the church, never dared to call in question the miraculous facts recorded in the Gospels. He shows by abundant testimonies from the same learned author, that the same books which now compose the New Testament, were from the very age of the apostles, received as inspired, and that these only were of authority in the church. The testimonies to the existence of the Christian church from Jews and infidels are also given from the same source. We should be pleased with an attempt by any infidel to rebut the testimonies collected by Lardner. If the historical testimony could have been discredited, it would have been done by Gibbon; and if the historical evidence could have been invalidated, we should never have heard of Hume's famous argument to prove that no testimony, however strong, is sufficient to render a miracle credible.

Upon the whole, we are better pleased with the defence of the New Testament than with that of the Old. Though he has, of course, nothing new, the author has placed himself under the guidance of some of the best advocates of Christianity. And we conclude our review by recommending the work to the careful perusal of all readers who have time to enter on such a volume, and by repeating our advice, that the whole be re-written and condensed.