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THE BIBLE A LITERARY NECESSITY.

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This article can lay no claim to originality. It is made up largely of tributes to the literary excellence of the Bible which have been gathered from various sources. The printing of it at this time is suggested by statements in the daily papers concerning the success of Roman Catholic priests in their efforts to exclude the Bible from the public schools in certain communities of our country. It seems worth while to show that this book is necessary to our best intellectual culture and that it cannot be excluded from the schools in which the children of America are educated without subjecting them to an intellectual impoverishment to which our citizens should not consent. There are, of course, other and graver aspects of this subject, but with them the present paper is not directly concerned.

DeQuincey has drawn a suggestive distinction between the Literature of Knowledge and the Literature of Power. He says the function of the first is to *teach*, the function of the second is to *move*. The first is a rudder, the second is an oar or a sail. A cook book, in so far as it is literature at all, belongs to the literature of Knowledge. Milton's "Paradise Lost" belongs to the literature of Power. What do you learn from "Paradise Lost"? Nothing at all. What do you learn from a cook book? Something new, something you did not know before in every paragraph. But you would not for that

reason put the cook book on a higher level of estimation than the great epic. What you owe to Milton is not any knowledge. What you owe is *power*, that is, exercise and expansion to your own latent capacity of sympathy with the infinite.

By the literature of knowledge, then, DeQuincey means that class of writings whose sole aim is to convey information, and by the literature of power he means that class of writings the object of which is not mainly to instruct, but to move the feelings and to give pleasure, such as fiction and poetry. But the distinction, while suggestive, is not absolutely correct, for, as DeQuincey himself says in a note, a great proportion of books—history, biography, travels, miscellaneous essays, etc.—do not belong strictly to either of these two classes. Macaulay's "History of England," for instance, contains a vast amount of information, but it is not its stores of information only which have attracted to it millions of readers; it is its fascinating style, its power of exciting the emotions, and its appeal to the moral nature.* The Bible also belongs to both categories in a still higher sense. It belongs unquestionably to the "Literature of Knowledge," for it is our only adequate source of information concerning the most momentous interests of mankind. It answers with infallible certainty all the great questions which have for ages agitated the minds of men: What is God? What is man? What are the conditions of deliverance from sin and acceptance with God? What lies beyond the grave? That the book which answers these transcendent questions belongs to the literature of Knowledge is too obvious for discussion. It is no less clear that the Scriptures belong to the literature of Power, and that here too they occupy the highest place. Not only for variety, interest and importance of matter, but also for simplicity, dignity and power of style, for perfection of ethical ideals, and for efficacy of impulse to righteousness, these sixty-six heaven-born books never have had and never will have a peer or rival in the literature of the world.

* H. J. Nicoll, *Landmarks of English Literature*, p. 10.

Merely as literature, therefore, the Bible is to the last degree stimulating and creative. There are many books that are mentally quickening, but this Book is unique in the measure of its power to arouse and energize the intellect. Every modern literature has felt its influence. In all the long list of English and American writers whose names survive, there is not one whose pages are not sprinkled with the words and figures of Holy Writ. Shakespeare, the first literary genius of the world, leans on it. Milton is saturated with its thought and diction. Professor Moulton, of the University of Chicago, who has made the literary forms of Scripture his specialty, says that he once read through on three successive days, each at a single sitting, an oration of Demosthenes, one of Burke, and the book of Deuteronomy, and he had the feeling at the time that neither of the other two rose to the oratorical level of the speeches of Moses. Edmund Burke, the greatest philosophical statesman that the British people ever produced, made a habit of reading a chapter in Isaiah before going to speak in the House of Commons. "Isaiah," he says, "possesses both the blaze of eloquence and the light of truth." James Anthony Froude says it will be found at the last that the book of Job towers above all the poetry of the world. John Ruskin, the supreme master of English prose, tells us that whatever of merit or power there is in anything that he has written is due to the fact that when he was a child his mother made him thoroughly familiar with the English Bible. In the poetry of Tennyson there are three hundred direct references to the Bible; in Longfellow, more than three hundred and thirty; Macaulay's essays are full of them. Hawthorne, the greatest American writer of fiction, confesses that the Bible and the "Pilgrim's Progress" (itself a product of the Bible) were the main sources of his inspiration. Sir Edwin Arnold, author of the "Light of Asia," says: "In response to the query, What do I owe to the Bible? my short reply would be *everything*; my long reply, to be sufficiently serious and comprehensive, would run to reams of paper. But, if I am addressed as a

man of letters, I would simply say that I owe my education as a writer more to the Bible than to any other hundred books that could be named." Our common English version appeared just at the time when it was able to combine with unique felicity Saxon force and Latin melody. In the reign of James I. "the glow and splendor of the Elizabethan era flung a robe before the advancing steps of Scripture more rare and splendid than that which Raleigh, in the story, laid at the feet of the Virgin Queen." John Richard Green says that, "as a mere literary monument, the English of the Bible remains the noblest example of the English tongue, while its perpetual use made it from the instant of its appearance the standard of our language." "Our Bible," says Dr. A. P. Peabody, "is still the key to the best English diction; and by conversance with it our children are made familiar with their own language in a purer form than any other which can be placed before them."

The study of the Bible is no less necessary for the mastery of the direct and practical style of the journalist than for the mastery of the more deliberate and elaborate style of the author. Charles A. Dana, the veteran editor of the New York Sun, and a master of his craft, addressing prospective journalists, used these words: "There are some books that are absolutely indispensable to the kind of education that we are contemplating and to the profession that we are considering; and of all these the most indispensable, the most useful, the one whose knowledge is most effective, is the Bible. There is no book from which more valuable lessons can be learned. I am considering it now, not as a religious book, but as a manual of utility, of professional preparation and professional use for a journalist. There is, perhaps, no book whose style is more suggestive and more instructive, from which you learn more directly that sublime simplicity which never exaggerates, which recounts the greatest events with solemnity of course, but without sentimentality or affectation—none which you open with such confidence and lay down with such reverence; there is no book like the Bible."

The Honorable Albert J. Beveridge, at present a United States Senator from Indiana, has recently published a little booklet, entitled "The Bible as Good Reading," in which he describes an expedition made by himself and a companion to the great woods of the North when they were both thoroughly tired by their year's work. Up the streams and over the lakes they went, he says, and "at last far out from the path of even canoe voyagers, on the shores of a lake whose name is Beauty, and in the depths of a forest whose name is Noble, by a mossy spring whose name is Delight, they swung their axes and built their camp." Nature began her work; they slept like pieces of iron and ate with the appetite of the primal man; but somewhat to their surprise they discovered in a day or two that their minds also craved some pabulum, and his companion said, "I want something to read." "Well," replied Beveridge, "what's the matter with the magazines?" The answer was, "I have read them all." "Well, what's the matter with the Bible?" "Oh," said his companion, "I don't want anything dull!" "Why, man," replied the Senator, "the Bible has more *good* reading in it than any book I know of. What will you have—poetry, adventure, politics, maxims, oratory? for they are all here." And he produced the Bible.

Thus occurred the first Bible reading in the woods. After it was over his companion said, "Why, I never knew that was in the Bible. Let's have some more of that to-morrow." And on the morrow they did have more of it. By chance, says the narrator, one of the guides was near, and he sat down and listened. The next day all the guides were there. The day after, the reading was delayed and Indian Charley modestly suggested: "Isn't it about time to have some more of that there Bible?" And more of it they had. This continued day in and day out through the long vacation in the woods, and thus another group of men discovered that there is more 'good reading' in the Bible than in all the volumes of fiction, poetry and philosophy put together. The writer proceeds to show that this conclusion is natural enough; that this book has not held its sway over the human mind for two thousand years without

having engaging qualities, something which appeals to our "human interest." Surely the Old Testament, which is a story of the most masterful and persistent people who ever lived, cannot help overflowing with everything human; and surely "The New Testament, which is the account of the Man who dominates all Christendom to-day, the Man who is the most powerful influence in civilization two thousand years after he has passed from earth; surely such an account could not be without a fascination compared with which our most thrilling novels and most passionate poems are vapid and tame."

For the detailed proof of his proposition, which Senator Beveridge gives, the reader must be referred to the booklet itself with its successive chapters on Old Testament Short Stories, New Testament Short Stories, The Bible and Common Sense, Moses the Lawgiver, Joseph the Dreamer, St. Paul: Orator and Missionary, and the rest.

Lord Macaulay, whose judgment on such a matter no informed man will lightly question, speaks of "that stupendous work, the English Bible,—a book which if everything else in our language should perish, would alone suffice to show the whole extent of its beauty and power."

Such testimonies and facts might be multiplied indefinitely. They are so numerous and so convincing that the supremacy of the Bible as literature and its unequalled power of inspiring and fertilizing the mind would scarcely need to be referred to further, but for another set of facts represented by the disheartening statistics published not long ago by President Thwing in regard to the astounding ignorance of the Scriptures displayed by certain bodies of college students, in one of the most prosperous and progressive parts of our country, when examined as to the meaning of various allusions in the greatest and most popular of contemporary poets to some of the most familiar incidents of biblical history. Twenty-two quotations from Tennyson's poems, containing references to the commonest passages of Scripture, were given to a body of young college men and a body of young college women, and they were asked

to explain these allusions. They evinced almost incredible ignorance. Out of the thirty-four men, nine failed to understand the quotation, "My sin was as a thorn among the thorns that girt thy brow." Eleven had never heard, apparently, of the "manna in the wilderness," nor sixteen of the "rock whence issued water." Only two had ever heard of the shadow turning back on the dial for Hezekiah's lengthening life. Only eight had ever heard of "Joshua's moon." Twenty-two did not know who "Baal" was. Nineteen had never read the exquisite idyl of "Ruth," with which Franklin once charmed and surprised a company of learned Frenchmen. Eighteen did not know what "Pharaoh's darkness" meant, and twenty-eight knew nothing of "Jonah's gourd." Only nine could explain an allusion to "Lot's wife." Twenty-three could not understand who "Arimathæan Joseph" was; and so on throughout the entire twenty-two questions. With the men, only forty-three per cent. of the questions were answered correctly; and with the women, forty-nine per cent. Some of the answers were positively startling. One young woman said that Joseph was called "Arimathæan" because he had a coat of many colors before being sold by his brothers. Another, when asked to tell who Iscariot was, said that "Iscariot means the cross on which Christ was crucified." Yet this test was made with those lay people whose knowledge of the Bible would presumably be most ample. The investigator, in calling attention to the disheartening result of his experiment, says: "To the Christian, this fact is significant, for the Bible is the corner-stone of the Christian system. To the moralist, this presentation is significant as evidence that the most important treatise on ethics is not adequately known. To the scholar, it is significant as standing for the failure of the better class of people of scholarly environment to know the most important piece of literature."

Prof. William Lyon Phelps, who occupies a chair in English at Yale University, gives similar testimony. He says: "The ignorance of college students of biblical literature is universal, profound and complete. The students at Harvard and Yale,

different as they are in many respects from their brothers in small colleges, resemble them closely here. . . . It is certainly unfortunate that the best book ever printed should be so little known, and that the frequent references to it in practically every English author should be meaningless." Writing in the Yale "Alumni Weekly," he says: "If I were appointed a committee of one to regulate the much debated question of college examinations in English, I should erase every list of books that has thus far been tried or suggested, and I should confine the examination wholly to the authorized version of the Bible." Prof. Phelps is mistaken in supposing that the students of all the other colleges are as ignorant of the Bible as he says those of Yale and Harvard are. When his statement was published, Prof. C. Alphonso Smith, then of the University of North Carolina, gave to his students such an examination as Prof. Phelps proposed as a test of their knowledge of the factual contents of Scripture, and the answers he received proved that the students of the Carolina institution did have a fair knowledge of them. Doubtless the same thing could be shown of the students in most of the Southern colleges. There is far more knowledge of the Bible in the South than in New England. Nevertheless a man would be blind indeed who could not see that the old-fashioned familiarity with Scripture is largely a thing of the past in nearly every part of our land.

Dr. Spofford, of the Congressional Library, in a recent address at Richmond on "The World of Books," said that "the Bible, considered merely as literature, without any regard to its doctrines, has more strong, nervous English, more pathos, more sublimity, more pith and power, than any other work in our language." Count Tolstoy says that "without the Bible the education of the child in the present state of society is impossible." President Schurman, of Cornell University, who cannot by any stretch of charity be called an evangelical man, has this to say about the relation of this book to education: "The Bible is the most important document in the world's his-

tory. No man can be wholly uneducated who really knows the Bible, nor can any one be considered a truly educated man who is ignorant of it."

To shut such a book out of the public schools where twenty-five millions of the children of the nation are educated, is to perpetrate a palpable fraud upon the intellects of the rising generation.