

ON THE BIBLE :

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TEXT-BOOK IN SCHOOL.

A PAPER READ

BY OLIVER WARREN,

BEFORE THE ASSOCIATION OF TEACHERS IN CONNECTION WITH
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PREFATORY NOTE.

The following paper is published with a view to place the important subject of which it treats, prominently before the Protestant population of Lower Canada,—Teachers particularly; and the Author would solicit all under whose notice it may come, and who feel an interest in the future well-being of man, to co-operate in agitating the question proposed.

THE BIBLE, A TEXT BOOK IN SCHOOL.

IN treating of the above subject, I purpose to remark briefly and occasionally upon man, the being for whom all educational institutions are designed. And I shall give only a synopsis of the train of thought suggesting itself in considering this momentous subject. In doing so, I shall leave many important points open for discussion; and it will afford me much pleasure, as well as profit, to hear the opinion of any present who may feel disposed to offer views on any of those points.

We behold man placed at the head of the animal kingdom by God, the Author of all nature. And we are compelled to admit the infinite wisdom of such an arrangement, when we consider the superior mechanism of man; but still more so when we remember that that wonderfully organized system, and that only, is the tenement of an immortal soul.

We know that from the disobedience of our first parents, death passed upon all men; and we are constantly reminded of the fact that man's time is short; but the Bible tells us, his eternity is infinitely long; and that it will be infinitely happy, or infinitely miserable, according to whether he accepts or rejects the redemption from not only original sin, but actual guilt, wrought out by Christ our Saviour.

What thoughtful person has not been forcibly struck with the fact, that a man may be in pursuit of an object to him dearer, apparently, than his own life,—for he sometimes ruins his health in the pursuit,—and the moment his ends are attained, the goal has lost half its brightness; and his soul

thirsteth for new objects to pursue, which in their turn meet the same destiny. Is not this conclusive evidence that no things of time can satisfy the immortal soul! But there is a book,—the Bible,—its Author is the Author of the immortal soul, its teachings are of eternity, as well as of time; that book, and that alone, approximately satisfies the longing soul.

It would be presumption on my part to go into the minutiae of Bible doctrine here; therefore, all my allusions to it shall be brief and of a very general character. Taking for granted all present are in favor of diffusing the knowledge contained in that Book of books, I venture to remark that, in my opinion, there is no error in our present system of education of so grave a character, or that proves so highly detrimental to our educational institutions, as that which excludes the Bible as a text book from school.

Whether it be theoretically or practically excluded, the result is the same. That it is excluded, may be questioned by some; but the statement is nevertheless true, although there are exceptional cases; but it is to be regretted these exceptions are comparatively few. I firmly believe, were the Bible to take its true position as a text book in school, the patronage extended to educational institutions would be, by a very large percentage, in advance of what it now is. And in cities like Montreal, ten hundred per cent. would be the minimum of increase to institutions of superior education, and universities, particularly in the department of arts. All the sources of revenue to educational institutions would be largely increased.

Such institutions would receive more careful attention, and would be established on a more substantial basis. Education would then have for its foundation-stone true Scriptural religion, for its culminating point the glory of God and the happiness of the immortal soul. The above remarks are made with all due deference to the subjects generally taught

in school ; but I do protest against making the study of the Word of God a Sunday work, and confining it to the Church and Sunday-school. It has a very strong tendency to depreciate a subject of vital importance.

Judging from the tone and character of man's every-day life, we become fully persuaded that the great majority of men are laboring under a fatal delusion. They seem to believe, if they give the subject a thought at all, that when a man sinks down into the bosom of mother earth, the grave closes over him to open no more: or if they believe in a resurrection, they forget that God is just as well as merciful, and hope that however they may slight God's divine ordinances, or whether they ever adopt any religious doctrine, God, in His goodness, will make salvation universal, and thereby include them among God's blessed for ever.

But what a startling revelation will be made on this point upon the resurrection morn. Fellow-teachers, if we can be instrumental in saving any from the terror of that day, let us be up and doing.

I propose that we prepare a resolution to be placed before the Provincial Association of Protestant Teachers for Lower Canada, soliciting its adoption, inviting the Clergy of the several Protestant denominations to make arrangements to the effect that a Bible lesson shall be given in each school at least once every week. Such a resolution would come from the Provincial Association with a great deal of force. Clergymen would see at once that, under such an arrangement, each school would be a kind of nursery for the Church; and it would cultivate a tendency to a more substantial union among the different sections of the Protestant Church,—a very desirable end, I fancy. And should a minister of the Gospel of Christ refuse to act in this matter, he would deserve to be looked upon as joining with Cain of old in rebellion against God, and saying, "Am I my brother's keeper?"

The idea may have suggested itself to some, that I have forgotten the very important truth, that salvation belongs to God. But I have not forgotten it ; nor have I forgotten that a very high standard of moral excellence is a very dangerous garb to appear in ; it betokens self-righteousness, than which nothing is more sure to shut man out of Heaven : and by nothing can man be more successfully dismantled of self-righteousness than by prayerfully studying the Word of God. I know that nothing short of a superhuman power can invariably and absolutely control the human heart for good ; but I also know the youthful mind is more susceptible of religious influences than the mind of the middle-aged or those still further advanced in years, which I consider a strong argument in favor of my theme. The school-boy has had to do only with kind parents, whose love for their child would not admit of deception ; consequently the child has never been deceived, and he is prepared to place implicit confidence in all he is taught. Without dwelling upon the dangers attending delay in this matter, what more favorable time can be looked forward to ? I know of none.

Besides, how important it is that the mind be well stored with spiritual knowledge at this early period. It is the source of infinite happiness ; and it wards off an incalculable amount of evil. How much more acceptable to God is the youthful soul, than that which has, during perhaps four-score years, constantly set God at defiance, rejected his offers of salvation, until now, that the world has little attraction for second childhood, the bowed with age conclude it is wisdom to go to Christ and be saved ! The spirit of man is in constant communion with the spirit world ; consequently the heart of man is either the throne of the Holy Spirit, or the throne of the spirit of the " wicked one," designated in Holy Writ, " the prince of the power of the air."

And just so surely as a man knows nothing of the Word of God, just so surely is he unconsciously the servant of that

hard prince whose currency is eternal death. Is it not a solemn thought, that the majority of parents, in providing for the education of their children, are perfectly satisfied with that system of education which turns out boys possessing fair morals, and capable of transacting the ordinary business of life with some degree of respectability, looking upon them when thus educated as competent to go forth into the world, to resist its temptations, and to overcome its evils, whether those following in the wake of prosperity or adversity; yet such is the case.

Under our present system of education, I know there are some whose pecuniary circumstances would not warrant them in going beyond the acquirements above mentioned; but they are the minority. And it is to be regretted that such a large majority of boys are put to business immediately upon leaving the common school, and so few—so very few, comparatively—are permitted to enjoy the advantages of a University course. Although salvation is extended to the unlettered, are we not justified in believing that the happiness of the liberally educated believer, in the future world, will be of a far superior character to that of the saved illiterate! And on the same principle, the fire of hell will be far more intense, and still more unbearable, to the highly educated, and persons of refinement. The happiness of those who from their youth have faithfully served the living God, must be much more desirable than that of the penitent thief; although his was a very remarkable instance of faith in God.

It is well known that lectures on educational subjects are exceedingly unpopular. So much so, that when the best talents the city can produce are secured in the lecturer, and the doors are thrown freely open to all, the attendance is comparatively small.

This, certainly, is a bad omen. It goes to prove that the soul of man is dead to its vital interests, and that something

is required to arouse man from this fatal lethargy. Now this state of things could not exist if the Bible occupied its true position in every household. And judging from past experience, it never will occupy that position, until it is made a text-book in school. I would not have you understand me to say, "Most families are without Bibles," for that would be a great mistake; on the contrary, most families have Bibles, and some have very beautiful ones, but I very much fear, with many they are valued more for ornament than as the word of the living God. You may think me severe, but it is a lamentable fact, that you may converse with a man upon the general topics of the day, and find him well posted; he may be a thoroughly expert business man, full of life and activity, until you advert to spiritual things—then he becomes petrified at once. He is actually dead to all things spiritual. And it is quite probable that he has contributed, among others, to raise funds to diffuse the Gospel of Christ among the heathen, while the Bible is to him a dead letter. This is, certainly, a deplorable aspect; but one that would be greatly improved by putting my scheme into practice.

In one of the Eastern Townships, comprising about one hundred square miles, there are fourteen Protestant schools; and, so far as I can ascertain, a Bible lesson was never given in any one of these schools, although in a central part of this township is a beautiful village, in which there are at present five resident Protestant clergymen. And doubtless there are many parallel cases within the jurisdiction of the Provincial Association.

The necessity for increased zeal in the diffusion of the Word of God in our midst is not a mere fancy, but a stern reality. As a proof, I would cite a fact, so disgraceful as to be almost incredible, but of which I have infallible proof. In a country village, not a hundred miles distant from Montreal, during last summer, a Daguerrean gallery was regularly

opened on Sunday, and patronized on that day by the most respectable class in the village, Protestants as well as Roman Catholics. The proprietor of the gallery was free to admit his mode of procedure was wrong, but stated, his receipts on that day were five hundred per cent. better than on any other day in the week; and if his gallery was closed on Sunday he would lose the patronage of all who would not take time to visit him during the week. Thus we have an example of a man bartering his soul for a few paltry pence; and a still more ruthless example, on the part of his patrons, of man setting God at defiance, and hastening on, as fast as the wings of Time can bear him, to an eternity of lost souls, simply for a momentary gratification. Again I appeal to you, as members of this Association, who should be thoroughly alive to the interests of Protestant education in Canada,—Does not an opportunity now present itself which we are in duty bound to improve! and if we allow it to pass unnoticed, shall we not be answerable for it in the great day of account!

Let us make an effort, lest we be styled barren cumberers of the ground. I believe the time will come when our posterity will look back to the organization of the Provincial Association of Protestant Teachers as an important event in the history of Lower Canada. It opens up a means for many improvements, which may be made of great practical benefit, and of a very general character. But in order that the above may be realized, a large amount of zeal must be put forth by those having an influence in educational institutions. Should this Association decide to prepare the resolution I have proposed, I think it would be adopted by the Provincial Association. If so, it would, by the Provincial Association, be placed before the several local Associations; which, with the co-operation of the Protestant clergy, would be able to overcome all obstacles in the way of its successful working.

In the opening of this paper, I adverted to some of the benefits arising to educational institutions out of my scheme, viz., increased patronage, increased revenue, more careful attention; and out of these three, the fourth, which I need not repeat, would follow as a natural result. That these institutions be duly patronized, it is necessary that they be appreciated; and I know of nothing that would do more in this direction than the scheme proposed. When a man becomes convinced that his time is probationary, and that it is immediately succeeded by an eternity of being, he will begin to feel the importance of educational institutions.

And when he comes to understand and realize the very important truth, that the enjoyment of his eternity will depend entirely upon the education he acquires in time, he will be compelled to feel that too much care and attention cannot be given to such an important work. And with these feelings pervading a community, educational institutions will be duly patronized. In regard to revenue, I may mention, the conviction that an eternity with God and his redeemed people, or an eternity with Satan and lost souls, is to be obtained during man's sojourn upon earth, would cause the rich to open wide their coffers, and to contribute liberally, and frequently, to the support of institutions which aim, not only at preparing students for a high standard of usefulness in this world, but to glorify God through all eternity, and to enjoy that eternal peace which passeth man's understanding.

The care such institutions would receive would be unquestionable. They would be dear to the heart of every enlightened soul, and they would receive the special care of all. They would be looked upon as the chief instrument of bringing man to the standard designed by God, and securing to him a place in the first resurrection. A thought occurs here, than which I can conceive of few more solemn.

Myriads of our fellow-mortals, possessing the very best natural talents, a highly developed physical and intellectual

temperament, an unblemished moral excellence, and amiable in the highest degree, will have no part in the first resurrection, simply because they will die without seeking the one thing needful.

If the certain destruction of that class of mankind who are victims to their own passions, and die on a level with the brute, is not sufficient to stir us to action ; if we have any friends in the former class,—and if we have none, there are those who have,—the thought that their graves will remain undisturbed by the first resurrection, while they are reserved for the second death, surely ought to give us decision of character, and cause us to withhold no longer our humble efforts to facilitate the diffusion of the Word of God. That the young cannot understand the Bible, may be offered as an objection to teaching it in school. But such an objection may be overruled. For example, the following quotation from the prophecy of Isaiah would be perplexing at first sight, while it is susceptible of a very simple explanation : “ Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given ; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.”

We readily understand how appropriate all these titles are to our Blessed Redeemer.

All who receive the Bible as the Word of God, must admit that He is wonderful, when they remember that he is the Author of all Nature. And all who have faithfully sought His counsel, are compelled to acknowledge Him as *the* Counsellor.

And who but a mighty God can save to the uttermost all who come to him for salvation !

And has not Christ, our Saviour, acted well the Father's part, in simply providing for all our wants, both temporal and spiritual ! But how exceedingly appropriate is the title

“ Prince of Peace ! ” for what peace is there for fallen man out of Christ !

When we observe that the Prophet was so certain of the fulfilment of this prophecy, that he used the present tense, although its fulfilment did not commence until seven hundred and forty-one years after it was predicted ; and when we recollect that this is only one of a multitude of passages which go to prove the truth of Holy Writ, how can we longer doubt !

And if we receive the Bible as the Word of God, how must we, from the heart, love that God who extends such invaluable friendship to us !

But we cannot so love God, unless we love all for whom he died. And if there are those whom we love, our first impulse is to do them good.

And what more substantial good can we do any, who are still strangers to the “ one thing needful,” than to assist them in obtaining it ! I maintain that it is utterly impossible for an intelligent person to study, judiciously, the Bible, without its resulting in the salvation of a soul. I also maintain that it is possible for the believing Bible student to know positively his position in regard to the future world. And so long as there is a lingering doubt or fear in regard to future happiness, it is evident that he who doubts or fears, has not completed his peace with God.

But if, when the time of dissolution is at hand, the victim can feel he would like his days lengthened, that he might still further serve the living God on this side the grave, but, at the same time can feel that to him “ to die is gain,”—then there can be no doubt ; and blessed are the dead who die thus.

It is important to bear in mind, we may be prominent members of any section of the Christian Church, we may be regular and prompt, displaying a fair amount of zeal in the observance of

religious ordinances ; but if our love for our fellow-man is not such as to make us anxious to place the Word of God prominently before him, that all may obtain a saving knowledge of the Gospel of Christ, then we do not love God, and can have no hope of an eternity with him.

While the Bible denounces any doctrine which puts a mediator between Christ and man, it assures us, the position of those who adopt no religious doctrine at all, is equally fatal.

In conclusion, my young friends, and fellow-teachers, God grant that, not only you and I go to Christ, not from mere *mercenary* motives, not because we gain heaven, and escape hell by so doing,—but, because we *reciprocate*, so far as possible, Christ's infinite love for us, which neither *Gethsemane* nor *Calvary* could waver. God grant, that not only you and I go to Christ from this *true* motive ; but that we be instrumental in causing *many* to seek Jesus under the same influence.

And I think we would take an important step in that direction, by making the Bible a text-book in school.