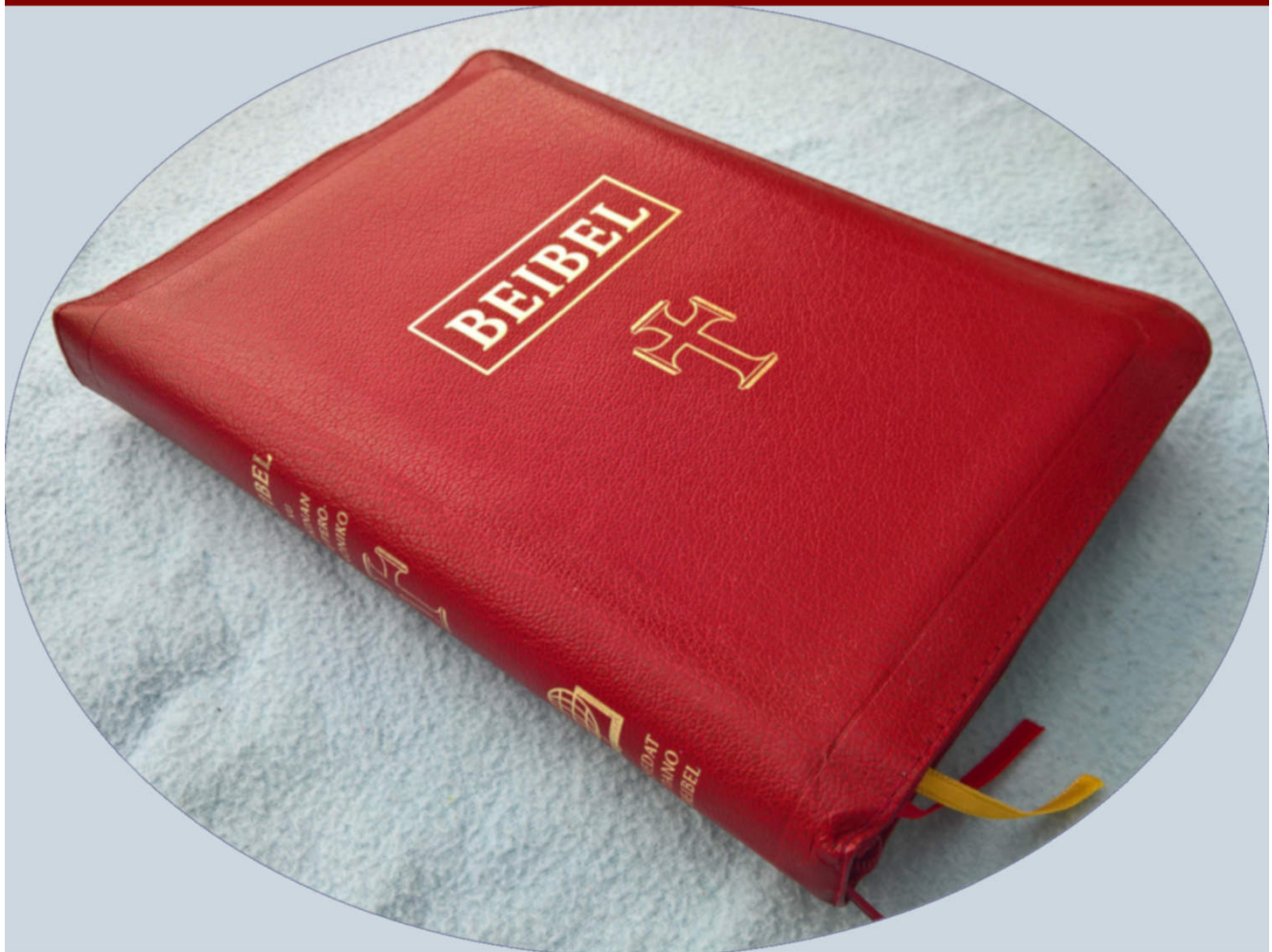


# Joseph FewSmith

## The Silent Influence of the Bible



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# The Silent Influence of the Bible

By Rev. Joseph FewSmith  
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# The Silent Influence Of The Bible.

**By Rev. Joseph Few Smith. A. M., Professor in the Theological Seminary, Auburn, N. York.**

*This article was originally delivered as an address before the Bible Society of Pennsylvania College and Theological Seminary, Gettysburg in 1849, and is now published by request, and without alteration.*

IN addressing such an audience as I see before me, it can scarcely be necessary to adduce arguments to prove that it is our duty to distribute freely the Holy Scriptures. That point, surely, will be readily admitted by all. Neither am I called to pronounce a panegyric on the Bible. The Bible needs no eulogy. Like the starry heavens that shine down upon us at night, while exhibiting their own attractive splendors speaking silently forth the glory of their Maker, the Bible is all glorious in itself, and glorious in the story of its origin. Bearing the impress of the Deity, it is radiant with his effulgence. The Word of God, it needeth not the praise of human lips.

Yet while neither argument nor panegyric may be necessary, we may, by seizing upon some important principles deeply seated in human nature, and some grand features of the Holy Volume, and some illustrative facts in its history, and contemplating these for a little time, find our convictions of duty deepened, and perhaps feel our hearts leaping forth with zeal for an energetic, and diligent doing of that which we ought to do.

It was a noble declaration of a noble mind: <sup>1</sup>

“I can scarce think any pains misspent that bring me in solid evidences of that great truth, that the Scripture is the word of God, which is, indeed, the Grand Fundamental. And I use the Scripture not as an arsenal, to be resorted to only for arms and weapons to defend this, or that party, or to defeat its enemies; but as a matchless Temple, where I delight to be, to contemplate the beauty, the symmetry, and the magnificence of the structure, and to increase my awe, and excite my devotion to the Deity, there preached and adored.”

Such a declaration is as replete with wisdom as with noble sentiment. The word of God is indeed “an arsenal” in which the friends of Truth may be furnished with armor for the combat with the legions of Error and Falsehood. But more beautifully is it to be regarded as “a matchless Temple”: — a fitting place for meditation, and for worship — admirable, indeed, for its “beauty and symmetry and magnificence of structure” — but most to be visited because therein a sweetly subduing influence settles on the turbulent spirit, and the fires of unholy passion become extinguished, and the anxious questionings of the soul are answered, and it is lifted up in devotion to the Great and Benevolent God. Not as a code of laws, not as a history of past transactions, not as a record of wonders, not as the utterance of the awful voice of Jehovah, not simply as an authorized announcement of the way of life, is the Bible most precious regarded; but as the token of Divine Love, as the expression of the heart of the Great God, as the winning message of a loving Friend, as an influence drawing the soul to that Friend, leading it in the way of life, and filling it with sublime and loving aspirations after holiness and devotion to Jehovah. There is a *Silent Influence* proceeding from the Holy Book, powerful and productive of various and vast results; an influence felt by all who read it, and extending itself through them to others who never look upon its opened pages: an influence which gives light to man, which gives understanding to the simple, which even now is transforming the character of nations, and giving a new face to the world. To some remarks on this subject, *The Silent Influence of the Bible*, I wish now to invite your attention. This influence presents itself to our view under three aspects: The *Intellectual*, the *Moral*, and the *Religious*. Each of these shall receive some notice, while the last will claim our more particular attention.

## The Intellectual Influence



It is one of the most striking, and most valuable characteristics of the Bible, that it is *the Book of mankind*. It is both designed, and prepared, for all people, and for all classes of people,. In it God addresses the whole human family: and as a parent speaking to his household seeks to adapt himself to the comprehension of each member of the circle, so is the word of God made to suit itself to the wants and the conditions of all. This is preeminently true with regard to its religious instruction: but it is also true in a general sense. The most intelligent mind, and the most cultivated taste may find in the Bible sources of information, means of mental discipline, of intellectual improvement, and of literary cultivation. The scholar may be delighted with its strains of poetry, its beautiful imagery, its terseness of expression, its richness of thought, its glorious themes of contemplation. The student of human nature may derive instruction from its historic records, its simple narratives, its faithful delineations, its searching revelations of the working of the heart. The inquirer into the history of our race, may be furnished with most ancient records, and even though he may not fully acknowledge its divine original, may at least derive light from it: bowing to it, however, as God's own word, he is led to fountains of historic truth such as are nowhere else to be found. The civilian has herein unfolded for his study a code of laws and a system of government of high antiquity, and of peculiar interest; while he also has much light thrown upon the state of jurisprudence and general civilization among various ancient nations, whose influence the world still feels. While for all these classes, in the perusal of the Sacred Volume, there is exerted an influence tending to the expansion of the mind, and to the cultivation of purity and strength, and proper elevation of literary taste. No man, indeed, whatever be his religious sentiments, has fulfilled the duty of a scholar, who has not read the Bible either in the original, or in his own tongue: and no man can read it carefully without finding in it a source of intellectual improvement — without feeling its influence silently exerted in his mind. Ample testimony is borne to this fact by men of every department of cultivated mind, and of every variety of opinions. The Bible is a book for the scholar. He cannot be without it — not only because its language and its sentiments are now interwoven into the very frame-work of all civilized society, but also because of the important and excellent influence which it may exert on his own intellectual character. And I would commend to all who, in connection with the literary Institutions of this place, are aiming at literary proficiency, these words of

Sir Thomas Browne: “I do believe the Holy Scriptures to be the word of God; yet were it of man, I could not choose but say it was the singularest, and superlative piece that hath been extant since the creation; were I a pagan I should not refrain the lecture of it, and cannot but commend the judgment of Ptolmey that thought not his library complete without it.” Religio Medici, p. 55.

And to this let me add the language of one of the greatest of men of our own day, an honor to our country, the venerable Adams:

“I speak as a man of the world to men of the world — and I say to you, Search the Scriptures. It is a book which neither the most ignorant and weakest, nor the most learned, and intelligent mind, can read without improvement.”

Nor can I forbear reciting the oft quoted words of the distinguished scholar and jurist, Sir William Jones:

“I have carefully and regularly perused the Holy Scriptures, and am of opinion that the Volume, independent of its divine origin, contains more sublimity, purer morality, more important history and finer strains of eloquence, than can be collected from all other books in whatever language they may have been written.”

But it is in view of the millions of our race whose education is comparatively neglected that this intellectual influence of the Bible is most valuable. It should be remembered, however, in this connection, that every cultivated intellect exerts an influence upon the uncultivated mass; so that what tends to the cultivation of one affects the whole. Facts clearly show that a Bible-reasoning community is more intelligent, that it carries a more elevated tone of thought and judgment, more correctness of taste and perception, is, on the whole, in a higher intellectual condition, than a community in which the Bible is unknown or neglected. The *preaching* of divine truth, the services of the sanctuary which usually accompany a free distribution of the Sacred Scriptures, do their part for the production of this effect. But independently of these, and of the education of the Sabbath School, which itself is due to the Bible, the silent influence of the Bible in cultivating the taste, and elevating the thoughts, and enlarging the comprehensions of the masses of men, is undoubtedly very great. The Bible is a grand Teacher of the community. It is the Schoolmaster in the family. It is a most potent friend and promoter of the great cause of Popular

Education. None can be its reader, or frequently hear it read, without intellectual profiting. And while this will in all probability be found true of all communities in which the Bible is read, in whatever language, it is peculiarly true of the English Bible. No book, probably, does more to give correctness and beauty of expression to the language of the millions who speak that tongue. Abounding in apothegms in pointed maxims, in beautiful and apt illustrations, with a sweet simplicity throwing its charming character over the whole, and yet with a strength and forcefulness unsurpassed, it is well adapted to form the general style; while its wondrous and lofty themes serve to interest and expand the general mind. The story of Scotland, and of Puritan England and America, amply establishes this point: while the records of German Literature and German History will tell us how much the Bible given to the people by the great Reformer, in their own nervous and rich language, accomplished at once for the general improvement, and how it even now exerts its formative and salutary influence.

## **The Moral Influence of the Bible**

But the *Moral Influence* of the Bible is of still higher significance. I need not stop to speak of the morality, which the Bible teaches, as the purest, and best adapted in the promotion of human good, that the world has ever seen. What else should we expect from Him who is infinite in purity and wisdom? How should the streams flowing from such a fountain be otherwise than bright and healthful, and pleasant to the soul? And what shall we look for from a people by whom this Bible is read, and who are brought under its influence? May we not expect to see them improved in all that pertains to individual and social welfare? and do not facts sustain this expectation?

The Bible is the friend of virtue, of good order, of domestic happiness, of liberty, and in favor of all these it is continually exerting its influence. Wherever it has gone it has proved itself the Reformer of the Morals, and a blessing to men. It rebukes all evil. It opposes a restraint to passion. It sternly reproves selfishness. It inculcates benevolence and brotherly kindness. It is an enemy to vice, and to all that disturbs the peace of society, or the happiness of mankind. And its history clearly shows, that it has ever

exerted a most benign influence on the communities in which it has been found. Often times, unaccompanied by any aid, dispersed among the people, like leaven hid in the meal, it has quietly wrought great changes, not only in individuals or in families, but in whole neighborhoods. It has ever been a light in the dwelling, and a glory and blessing to the nation, and to it the cause of human liberty, and human good is incalculably indebted. The truth of this will be most strikingly exhibited by a glance at some facts. We need not resort for our illustrations to contrasts between Heathen and Christian lands: nor need we go back to the ages preceding the Reformation, during which the Bible was to the millions of the people a sealed book, and even to the large majority of those who presumed to be professed teachers of its doctrines was unknown. After the Reformation the Southern nations of Europe, for the most part, resisted the introduction of the Sacred Scriptures among the people, while in the North their circulation was favored. — Even at the present day the grand distinction between Protestant and Catholic nations lies in the fact, that the one excludes the Bible, while the other gives it to the people: or rather one gives the word of God mingled and defiled with human traditions, the other, in its purity. Now it is found that in the Bible reading nations there is and ever has been, more liberty, more elevation of the people, more general comfort and happiness, and more general intelligence, as well as a higher regard to the laws of equity, of benevolence, of social kindness, than in those nations which are ignorant of God's Word.

The Bible has served, and is serving, to break down the tyranny of the Monarch, of Feudalism, and of Priestcraft. It elevates the people. It enforces the great principle which lies at the foundation of sound government, the *Equality of Rights*, and teaches that government is intended for the general good of the nation, and not for the aggrandizement of the few. It makes the people feel their strength, and leads them to assert their rights. While at the same time it promotes good order, makes a nation law-loving and obedient, and opposes itself to wars.

To sustain these remarks you may contrast Germany with Spain and Italy, or even Protestant with Catholic Germany — or Scotland with Ireland. Spain has obstinately refused to allow the Bible to come among the people — and what a scene does she present? Scarce a nation on the earth so low in consideration, and so slight in influence as she — torn with internal distraction, in almost constant anarchy, with an impoverished

people, and a tarnished name abroad. Scotland, rich in the Bible, has long been noted for the morality and intelligence of her people: while poor Ireland, with all her native resources, and all the inherent excellence of her people, enshrouded in ignorance and cursed with oppression, has been the prey of designing men; has exhibited the fierceness of savages; even now writhes in wretchedness and is stained with most revolting crimes. Of Italy the lament might long have been, "How has the mighty fallen! How art thou destroyed, O thou renowned city!" A new life seems now to be stirring her cold form. The principle of popular rights seems to have forced itself an acknowledgment. Strange scenes have been enacted within the ancient city, and strange voices heard — scenes which might stir the blood of a Brutus or a Rienzi, and make a Borgia or a Gregory tremble — and although we may not fully understand the much lauded Pius, we trust that in this movement will be found the germs of Italian liberty, and noble elevation. But it is worthy of careful observation, that within the past few years there have been circulated in Italy a number of copies of the Holy Bible as received by Protestants: and while we may not be able to trace directly to these any of the new popular opinion, and recognition of popular rights, yet I doubt not they have been silently exerting their influence; and to these Bibles and to others that shall follow them must the lover of human liberty and human improvement, look, with hopeful eye, for the regeneration of Italy.

If we look to Great Britain and America, we shall find the history of the silent moral influence of the Bible deeply interesting. The first English translation of the Sacred Scriptures, that of Wicklif, remaining in manuscript, could not be extensively read because the copies of it were comparatively few. Yet that had its important and excellent influence. — voices were lifted up in its behalf even in high places. It cast into the British soil a germ of life which has never perished. And I do not hesitate to express the opinion, that to the English Bible are Great Britain and America very greatly, if not mainly, indebted for their large liberty, and grand national characteristics. But for a long time the influence was silently working in England. The translation by Tyndale was among the first printed English books: but all the authority of the crown and the hierarchy opposed its introduction among the people. Yet it went among them, despite of persecution and of martyrdom, and it was silently working in many homes

and many hearts. It was concealed from the search of those in authority, and thus numerous copies were handed down from father to son.

“Fierce, whisker’d guards that Volume sought in vain, by stealth, and hid with anxious pain; all around was misery and gloom, showed the boundless bliss beyond the tomb; from the venal priest, the feudal rod. led the sufferer’s weary steps to God; when his painful course on earth was run, his chief wealth, descended to his son”

“The highly prized treasure, read often in the dead of the night, was concealed under the bed, in hay-lofts, or in outhouses;” and in one case — “a diligent search being made for all suspicious books” — “a gentleman sent for a bricklayer, and built up a wall in his chamber against the place where all his books were, and so enclosed them in security from the danger of being taken, preserving them for himself against better times.”<sup>2</sup> And so by means of its silent influence, the people were made to be in advance of their rulers; and when the latter openly threw off the Romish yoke, they found a nation ready to rejoice in freedom. And as the light of Divine Truth was more widely diffused, and clearly perceived, the principles of civil liberty were more fully realized, and Britain advanced then forward to her present high degree of glorious freedom. The influence of the Bible was seen in her noble hearted Puritans, and converted a rebellion into a revolution pregnant with most happy issues. It was seen in the colonists who came to these western regions, and sought and found “freedom to worship God.” It is seen in our free Institutions — in the foundation and the pillars of this great Republic. It is seen in the general intelligence and love of order of our people. It is clearly to be discerned in the footsteps of our Puritan and subsequent ancestry, and in our revolutionary struggle. And it makes the striking contrast between our happy Republic, and the neighboring States of Mexico, and South America. Here are brought into close contact a nation with the Bible, and a nation without it, and the most careless and most prejudiced observer cannot fail to be struck with the vast difference between the two.

An equally remarkable and striking illustration of the moral influence of the Bible is furnished us in the contrast between the French Revolution of 1793, and the English and American Revolutions; and also by the admirable resistance in Britain and America to the demoralizing influences of the French commotion. France was a wild scene of passion, of fierce rioting, of blood and carnage. *She had no Bible among her people*, and they raged with

unbridled licentiousness, and wrought terrific misery. In England, it is true, the king was brought to the scaffold, and a civil war raged. But no such scenes of lawless violence and foul rioting were there enacted. All was conducted in the firmness and steadfastness of stem principle, deluded, it may have been, for a moment, mistaken, and perhaps turned somewhat aside by the mighty ruling of one ambitious mind — yet ever keeping liberty with Constitutional Law in view. And in our own country we have the noblest example of a Revolution conducted without excesses — of liberty working out her triumph, while yet bowing herself to her guardian law. And to what are these excellent characteristics to be largely traced? And what was it that enabled Britain, (and to some extent the remark will apply to our own country), so successfully to resist that tide of infidelity in religion, and radicalism in politics, which, acting in France both as a cause and a consequence of her bloody Revolution, seemed threatening to sweep away the people into a like gloomy vortex? It was the Bible — the Bible read among the people. Noble champions were raised up to defend the Bible: but it was doubtless the Bible itself, known to the people and read by them, that formed under God their great barrier and strong defense. Here let me quote the language of a recent English writer:—<sup>3</sup>

“Throughout the eighteenth century there had risen not one French mind of sufficient power and skill to gainsay and resist, so as to check the tide of Infidelity. No, it spread over the people, and swept all before it into one common ruin. And why? *The people in France* HAD NOT READ THE SCRIPTURES FOR THEMSELVES. A *ceremonial* religion, though supported by immense wealth, had proved to be no barrier. On British ground there was a difference. Her skeptics in succession, had every one of them, been looked hard in the face. From Herbert down to Hume and Paine, they had been fully met, exposed and overthrown; while Deism, false Philosophy and boasted human Reason, were not only tried by appeal to the oracles of God, but scrutinized as to their moral tendency, and found wanting. But why all this? or rather, why successful to whatever degree? We hesitate not to reply that there is but one answer. *The people in Britain* HAD LONG READ THE SCRIPTURES FOR THEMSELVES.”

But I am dwelling too long on this point. Did time permit it would be interesting to illustrate it still farther: and to trace the moral influence wrought through the instrumentality of the British and Foreign Bible Society, and our own beloved institution of a later date. The Bible is the noblest safeguard of a free people. The friend of human liberty, it is equally the enemy of licentiousness. It will elevate the mass while it enforces the supremacy of law. Its whole history has been the history of a benign

influence, blessing mankind, advancing civilization, subduing barbarian rudeness and tyrannic oppression, nourishing all the sweet graces of domestic love and social kindness, purifying society, and promoting virtuous living and general refinement.

## The Religious Influence

I come now to speak of the *Religious Influence* of the Bible — and this is the grandest aspect of our subject, and one to which no human mind can do complete justice. With its religious influence, its moral influence is closely connected, and indeed, upon it is greatly dependent. The Bible teaches us the true Religion, the religion of God. It is a light from heaven shining upon the path in which man gropes in darkness. It is the voice of an angel saying to the anxious multitudes who are crowded around the altar bearing the inscription, “*To the Unknown God,*” “whom ye ignorantly worship, Him declare I unto you.” It alone makes known unto us the true God, and Jesus Christ whom He has sent — in the knowledge of whom standeth Eternal Life. The Bible alone points out to man the way of life. The Bible alone tells how Jehovah may be worshipped — how sin may be forgiven. The Bible alone assures us of immortality — answers the questionings of the soul — gives credible promise that the soul’s anticipation of a coming judgment shall be realized — tells with authority of heaven and hell — and points to the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world. The Bible alone meets the wants of man and satisfies his desires. The religion of the Bible — the religion of God in Jesus Christ, is bread to the hungry, is water to the thirsty soul. It is the oil and wine poured by the good Samaritan into the wounds and bruises of the poor wayfarer. It is the Balm of Gilead that heals the soul’s thirst. It is the staff of the aged. It is the guide of the young. It produces peace, begets patience, endues with courage, inspires with hope. It enriches the poor, and is to the rich man more precious than all his wealth. It is a religion for this life — a religion for eternity — a religion for the soul. And as such, intended for all men, proceeding from the God and Father of all, it is adapted unto all; and in the blessed Book, is God’s most glorious plan of saving men set forth, in language so plain that ail may understand, and on terms so gracious that none need perish.

"O how unlike the complex works of man,



Heaven's easy, artless, unencumbered plan!  
No meretricious graces to beguile,  
No clustering ornaments to clog the pile;  
From ostentation, as from weakness, free,  
It stands, like the cerulean arch we see,  
Majestic in its own simplicity.  
Inscribed above the Portal, from afar  
Conspicuous as the brightness of a star,  
Legible only by the light they give,  
Stand the soul quickening words: "*Believe and Live.*"

When we pause for a moment to consider this aspect of our subject we are overwhelmed with its magnitude. When we regard the human race as sunk in sin, yet every man immortal — when we see the millions bowing to grievous and debasing superstitions, toiling under the burdens of this life, and hurrying to eternity to meet a tribunal at which they must plead guilty, — and then behold in this precious volume the means of lifting them up from the depths of sin, of giving them peace and contentment under the cares of life, and especially of delivering them from condemnation, and preparing them for a happy immortality — how can we estimate its value or find language to speak of its importance to mankind. Select one individual out of the countless multitudes of human being's to whom to apply the benefits of the Holy Book, and let that one, if you choose, be taken from the mass whose lot is poverty and toil: and marking the blessed influence of the Bible in this one case — seeing it giving patience, and resignation, and cheerfulness to the soul, ennobling the character, making life glad with peace of mind, and joy in believing, and sustaining with the bright hope of "a treasure in the skies:" — and then letting the mind run on to contemplate that treasure, rich and everlasting:—just think of the millions on millions who have been, and may yet be made partakers of the same blessings; and of the millions on millions now without the Bible; and say,

"Shall we whose souls are lighted

With wisdom from on high, \

Shall we to men benighted,

The Lamp of Life deny?"

## **“Without Note or Comment”**

But let it be remembered that it is of the *Silent Influence* of the Bible that we are speaking; that is, of the influence which it exerts in itself without the aid of oral teaching, or the written expositions of men. And this is of special importance to a society, whose great business it is to circulate the Holy Scriptures “without note or comment.” The great fact is not overlooked that God has appointed “the ministry of reconciliation,” as the instrument for the conversion of sinners; that it has pleased Him “by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.” Neither do we forget, that it is the province of the Holy Spirit to renew the heart of fallen man, and bring him to his God. But it is a fact of the utmost importance, and affording the highest encouragement for zealous perseverance in the work of disseminating the Word of Life, that the Bible itself, without external aids, is often the means of producing conversions — of transforming the servants of sin into children of the most High God. It carries with it a power which, silently exerted, is deeply felt. We need not speculate with theologians about the inherent power of the letter of the Sacred Volume, nor discuss the question, whether the Holy Spirit invariably accompanies the written word. It is enough for us to know that the Bible, alone, in its simplicity, without the preacher or the expositor has led men unto God in Christ. Facts abundantly testify to this. Instances of such a nature have probably come under the observation of many of us.

## **Examples From Real Life**

### **A Man of Intelligence**

I have seen a man of intelligence and uprightness, reading for years his Bible, and escaping from the snares of the adversary, deriving silently and gradually therefrom his convictions, his penitence, his faith, his devout obedience.

### **An Aged Man**

I watched the dying of an aged man who had long read the Bible, yet refused to give up his sins; and who had often scoffed at its holy teachings: and I marked in the yielding of his soul, in his acknowledgments almost unwillingly given, and at last in the trembling outstretching of the hand of faith, a striking testimony to the silent working of the Holy Word.

## **A Young Man**

A young man of talents, and bright promise, yet without a proper faith in Christ, was arrested by disease; and in his bed of suffering the Bible became his teacher, and by degrees his chief companion; and it made all his bed in his sickness, and flung the light of heaven over his departing soul.

## **Luther**

How often has a single passage of the Holy Volume fixed itself in the mind and worked silently and powerfully there! How often has the reading of one of the Gospels wrought mighty changes! Is not the silent influence of the Bible remarkably evinced in the numbers who, reading it secretly, were enabled by the strength which it afforded, to endure the pains of persecution, some of them even unto death? Nay, was it not the reading of the Holy Volume which, under God's grace, lifted Luther out of the depths in which he might otherwise have remained? Did not the perusal of the Holy Book kindle a fire within his soul, which burned and blazed until Europe and the world saw (he light and felt the heat? And was it not a fitting and noble return which he, Bible enlightened, and by the Bible set free, made to God, in giving the Bible unto his countrymen, that it might likewise burn in their souls, and be to every household a pillar of fire for their guidance and defense?

## **The Earl of Rochester**

It is related of the noted Earl of Rochester, whom one of his biographers describes as "a great wit, a great sinner, and a great penitent," that, "Reading the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, he was convinced of the truth and inspiration of the Scriptures, the Deity of the Messiah, and the value of his atonement as a rock on which sinners may build their hopes of salvation.

On that atonement he rested, and died in the humble expectation of pardoning mercy and heavenly happiness.”

## **Mr. Robert Aitkin and Paine’s “Age of Reason”**

The following incident is related upon good authority: —

“Mr. Robert Aitkin, a bookseller of Philadelphia, was the first person who printed a Bible in that city. While he kept a book-store, a person called on him, and inquired if he had Paine’s “Age of Reason” for sale. He told him he had not; but having entered into conversation with him and found that he was an infidel, he told him that he had a better book than Paine’s “Age of Reason,” which he usually sold for a dollar, but would lend it to him, if he would promise to read it: and after he had actually read it, if he did not think it worth a dollar, he would take it again. The man consented, and Mr. Aitkin put a Bible into his hands. He smiled when he found what book he had engaged to read, but said he would perform his engagement. He did so: and when he had finished the perusal, he came back and expressed his deepest gratitude for Mr. Aitkin’s recommendation of the book, saying it had made him, what he was not before, a happy man; for he had found in it the way of salvation through Christ. Mr. Aitkin rejoiced in the event, and had the satisfaction of knowing that this reader of the Bible, from that day to the end of his life, supported the character of a consistent Christian, and died with a hope full of immortality.”

## **Left At The Barn**

A distributor of a Bible Association in the State of New York, “called at a house where he met with an angry repulse. The man of the house was full of ‘cursing and bitterness;’ he would not suffer a Bible to be left at his house. ‘If left anywhere,’ said he, ‘it shall be left at the barn.’ ‘Very well,’ the distributor meekly replied, ‘I do not know that I could select a better place for it: our blessed Saviour once lay in a manger!’ He went quickly to the barn and deposited the sacred treasure in a safe place, with much prayer that it might bless even him who would not allow it to remain in his house. The man struck with the unexpected reply of the distributor, was led to think of his own rashness and guilt, and especially of the Saviour’s Birth-place. After two or three days his distress became so great, that he went out

to the barn in search of the rejected volume. He turned to the passage which records the circumstances connected with the Birth of the Redeemer, and wept, and, it is hoped, repented, and consecrated himself to God through faith in Christ. The once spurned book now found a place, not only in his house, but its truths were received into his heart and controlled his life.”

Many more facts of this kind might easily be mentioned, showing conclusively, that there is a wonder-working power in the Holy Bible. Let me call your attention to two others, similar in their character to these already stated, yet possessing some peculiarities. The first opens to our minds a view of the immense amount of good that may be accomplished by means of a single copy of the Scriptures.

### **A Roman Catholic Priest**

“A Romish Catholic Priest lived in Yucatan, about the end of the last century and near to the British Settlement, who was in the habit of reading and preaching from a Spanish Bible, which somehow had fallen into his possession. He was forbidden to do so, but persevered, and was cast into prison, where he was left to die. His old house-keeper got his Bible, read from it to the villagers and young people, who assembled around her on the feast days of the church. She not only instructed them, but was often sent for by the dying. The Bible was left to a young woman who was the pupil of this housekeeper, and who with others, when advanced in life, came seeking books from Mr. Henderson in Belize. Discovering an instructed mind, and unusual regard for the Scriptures, inquiry was made, and the preceding facts came out in explanation. Here was a Bible passing through three generations, and blessing each, and yet for fifty years, the good it had done was unknown beyond its immediate hearers.”<sup>4</sup>

### **Rev. Dr. Corrie, Bishop of Madras**

“The late Rev. Dr. Corrie, Bishop of Madras, was formerly the Chaplain of Allahabad. At that time there was no Hindustani version of the Scriptures; and it was his custom to translate, on small bits of paper, striking passages of Scripture into that language, and every morning distribute these papers at his door. Twenty years after, he received a communication from a Missionary at Allahabad, who informed him that a person in ill health had

arrived there, and that he had been to visit him. He had come to see his friends and die among them, after an absence of more than twenty years. The missionary had visited him there several times, and was so astonished at his knowledge of the Scriptures, and his impressions of its great realities, that he put the question —"How is it, my friend, that you are so well informed in the Sacred Scriptures? You have told me that you have never seen a Missionary in your life, nor any one to teach you the way of life and salvation!" And what was his answer? He put his hand behind his pillow, and drew out a bundle of well worn and tattered bits of paper, and said: "From these bits of paper which a a sahib distributed at his door, whom I have never seen since, have I learned all. These papers which I received twenty years ago, and have read every day, till they are thus tumbled and spoiled are passages of Scripture in the Hindustani language, from them I have derived all the information on eternal realities which I now possess. This is the source of my information; thus I have derived my knowledge."<sup>5</sup>

## What Sort of Book is This?

What testimony, my brethren, does God bear to his word! How has he blessed it! What encouragement have we here for labor! What a power resides in the Holy Volume! And in view of its silent influence, of its most blessed effects, may we not exclaim, in the eloquent language of another: “What sort of Book is this, that even the winds and waves of human passion obey it? What other engine of social improvement has operated so long, and yet lost none of its virtue? Since it appeared, many boasted plans of amelioration have been tried and failed; many codes of jurisprudence have arisen and run their course and expired. Empire after empire has been launched on the tide of time, and gone down leaving no trace on the waters. But this Book is still going about doing good — leavening society with its holy principles — cheering the sorrowful with its consolations — strengthening the tempted, encouraging the penitent, calming the troubled spirit, and soothing the pillow of death. Can such a Book be the offspring of human genius? Does not the vastness of its effects demonstrate the excellency of the power to be of God?”

Such, my hearers, is the Bible: and such its influence: so rich in blessings, so precious to the soul. What lover of his country will not aid in its distribution? What lover of mankind will not seek to give it to all the world? What Christian heart is not filled with desire that all men may partake of the royal gift — earth’s solace, and the guide to heaven?

Such is the Bible; and daily, hourly are we drinking from the rich streams of its blessings. It is to us the ark of God’s covenant. It is the Shekinah in our tabernacles — the visible token of God’s presence with us. Oh let us not forget our indebtedness, nor fail to make thank-offerings unto Him who gives it to us!

Such is the Bible; wherever it goes silently, but powerfully exerting its happy influence — expanding the intellect, purifying the morals, elevating the character, solacing the woes, breaking the fetters of mankind; strengthening liberty with the support of law; throwing away the burdens of superstition and idolatry; allaying the fears of awakened conscience, and guiding perishing souls to everlasting salvation.

## The Great Need

*We have this Bible* — but oh! how many millions of our race are destitute of it!

In 1834 it was estimated that the whole number of Bibles in the world was not more than *Twenty* millions. If we suppose that the yearly issue in the world, for the last fourteen years, has averaged *five* millions, which is probably a large estimate, we should have the amount of ninety millions. But this amount must be very considerably reduced by an allowance for books worn out, or otherwise destroyed. Supposing the number, however, at present, in the world to be ninety millions, and estimating the population of the world at one thousand millions; we behold nine hundred and ten millions of our race, immortal as we are, destitute of the Word of Life — that word which alone tells of Jesus Christ! Or supposing, which is far from being the case, that the Bibles were distributed one to each family, taking five as the average number of the family — there would then be one hundred and ten millions of families, or five hundred and fifty millions of souls without a Bible!

I need not detain you by speaking of the heathen nations who bow down to idols, and are sunk in the worst forms of superstition; where woman is treated as a brute; where the car of Juggernaut rolls over its deluded victims; and the widow is burned at the husband's funeral pile, and children are thrown into the muddy stream, or buried alive in the earth; where weary pilgrimages are performed, and poor burdened human beings torture their bodies for the sake of their souls.

But the estimate just made presents us the startling fact, that there are millions nominally Christian, and living in civilized lands who are without the Bible! Oh what a call on Christian benevolence and activity! It is altogether probable, that the number of inhabitants in Great Britain, and the United States would be fully equal to the whole number of Protestant Bibles in the world — certainly, if to this number the people of Germany be added, the amount will fully equal that of the Bibles.

But we may come still nearer home — and while the cry for the Bible comes to us from crowded China, and teeming India, and the mountains of Palestine and Persia, and France and Italy are opening avenues for its entrance among the people, our land is full of waste places! Yes! this land,



so much blessed, and so much owing to the Bible its blessedness, contains thousands of families destitute of the Bible! It is estimated that the annual issue of Bibles and Testaments in our land, is about equal to the annual increase of our population. But of this issue a large part is exported to other lands. Besides there is the constant demand arising from the wearing out and loss of volumes. So that the supply is far from equaling the demand. Had the American Bible Society sufficient funds, it might readily double its issues, and yet not be able to meet the wants of the people. But it must be remembered, that the work of the Bible Society is not simply to furnish Bibles to those who apply for them; but also to seek out the destitute and offer them the Bread of Life — to bring the Holy Word before the minds of many who would otherwise never see it, and be unblessed by its precious influence. Various motives deter the destitute from seeking a supply; and it becomes our business to present the supply in their own homes. It has been found that the work of exploration and distribution must be repeated once in five years. Many persons are inclined to think that there is no destitution in their immediate neighborhood: but investigations often show this to be a mistaken opinion. Unless a thorough exploration and distribution have recently been made in this borough and vicinity, I doubt not you will find many in need of Bibles among you and around you. An agent in Massachusetts, the home of the Puritans, and a center of light, says: “In one place I found a family married eight years which had never a Bible, and seven others within one mile *where the minister said there could be no destitution*. Prominent persons in all the towns were very confident I should find no families destitute near there. But in visiting I found such in every town, and almost in every neighborhood; some under the droppings of the Sanctuary, and in densely populated streets.” Of your own State it is said: “Notwithstanding Pennsylvania was reported as supplied in 1845, still we find the demand for the Word increasing every year. Those counties that were supplied in 1843-4 are now engaged in a resupply, and find large destitutions. In Payette County, 688 families were destitute, and supplied; and over 4,000 youths were supplied with the New Testament. This County was supplied in 1843. In addition to the 688 Bibles disposed of in that County to families destitute, over 800 copies were sold to families requiring additional copies. In Green County over 400 families were found destitute and supplied. In Warren County were found 300 families destitute out of 1500 visited, equal to one-fifth. These are fair specimens of the destitutions

where investigation is made. And this too in those Counties which were supplied in 1843 and 1844. Facts like these teach us that we have no stopping place in the Bible work. Supply a County thoroughly the present year, and if the County is explored even the succeeding year, a considerable destitution is found.”<sup>6</sup>

## Conclusion

But my own interest in the subject is causing me, I fear, to weary my audience, and I hasten to a conclusion. The course of thought which we have pursued makes it abundantly evident, that the Bible-cause appeals to us by every motive of patriotism, philanthropy, benevolence, and Christian duty. If there be any cause worthy to awaken an interest, and enlist our sympathy, and call out our liberal contributions, it is this. In this cause all may unite. In this work of the Lord differences of name and sentiment may be forgotten. Around this Holy Ark, the different tribes of Christian Israel may arrange themselves with their several banners, yet feel themselves to be but one people, and sing one song of praise to the Redeeming God. In aiding this cause all may unite in fulfilling the mission of the Lord Jesus, in the proclamation of glad tidings to all the world. Do you need an *argument*, my hearers? Here is one simple, and incontrovertible. The Bible is God’s blessing to mankind — the Book of life-giving influences to the world. You have the Bible; millions of your fellow-beings have it not. How plain, how solemn, how imperative your duty! Do you need *incitement*? Think once more of the blessings of the Bible, and of the destitute; and while your own table is covered with the Bread of Life, will you not throw some crumbs to the hungry? To use a beautiful figure, though not the language of another: while the manna falls thickly around your camp, and the pure water from the smitten rock refreshes your souls, will you not remember (he parched and famishing wayfarers in (he wilderness, and bid them welcome to a share in your blessings? “Freely ye have received: freely give.”

Do you ask for *encouragement*? It is abundant. Good has been done. Every Bible is doing good. Every person, who contributes to this cause, is doing a most noble work of goodness. Find your encouragement in the influence you may thus be able to exercise for the benefit of your country, for the good of your fellow-citizens, and your fellow-men. Find it in the

contemplation of the silent influence of each copy of the Sacred Volume, which you may be the means of placing in the hand of a destitute fellow being. Find it in the consciousness of doing good. Find it in the anticipation of a glorious future. All who, with a proper love to God, and in the spirit of the blessed Volume, aid in sending it forth throughout the earth, shall participate in the gladness of that day, when the ransomed of the Lord shall come to Zion, when earth's miseries all finished, earth's darkness all dispelled, the King, even He who once, though He was rich, for our sakes became poor that we through his poverty might be made rich; the King shall sit upon his holy hill of Zion, and around him shall be assembled all his faithful ones, and pointing to this and that abode that was blessed by His Word, shall say, "Well done, ye blessed, inasmuch as ye did it unto these, ye did it unto me."

May the hearts of all present be favorably disposed towards this good cause, and may the Society here convened be blessed with extensive usefulness, through God's abounding grace.

AMEN.

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1. The Hon. Robert Boyle — quoted in Anderson's *Annals of the English Bible*.↵
  2. *Annals of the English Bible*, Vol. II. p. 304.↵
  3. *Annals of Eng. Bible*, Vol. II. p. 532.↵
  4. *Day Spring*, April 1847.↵
  5. *Ibid.* p. 43.↵
  6. *Am. Bible Society Report*, 1847, p. 125.↵

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# How Can You Find Peace With God?

The most important thing to grasp is that no one is made right with God by the good things he or she might do. Justification is by faith only, and that faith resting on what Jesus Christ did. It is by believing and trusting in His one-time *substitutionary* death for your sins.

Read your Bible steadily. God works His power in human beings through His Word. Where the Word is, God the Holy Spirit is always present.

Suggested Reading: [New Testament Conversions](#) by Pastor George Gerberding

## Benediction

Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen. (Jude 1:24-25)

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