

“The Value and Influence
of the Bible”

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BY THE

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THE VALUE AND INFLUENCE OF THE BIBLE.

By ARTHUR S. TOMPKINS

at the 114th Anniversary of the New York Bible Society.

THERE is no arithmetic by which the value of the Bible can be calculated,—there is no rule by which its influence for good can be measured or even be approximated. Within the reasonable limits of an address for such an occasion, it is only possible to speak in general terms, and to refer briefly to some of the good things in life that have their source in the Book of Books.

The New York Bible Society is to be congratulated upon its splendid history and its wonderful contributions, during the past 114 years, to the peace and happiness of mankind. It has furnished the Bible to American soldiers of the four wars in which our country has been engaged since its work began. For 90 years it has given to each immigrant, arriving at the port of New York a Bible printed in the language of his native country. In 53 languages has the Bible been published by this Society. Seamen from all countries, the sick in the city hospitals, the inmates of prisons, the hotels of this City have all been furnished gratuitously with this sacred Book, while the blind have received copies in raised type.

The early Christians adopted the Old Testament and the teachings of Christ as the foundation of their faith and practice and established their churches thereon and went

forth and preached the Gospel as they had been commanded to do. They kindled the religious fire that has never been quenched. The Bible gave to the middle ages its best civilization and was the inspiration of the poets, musicians, artists, preachers, philosophers, and statesmen of that period. King Alfred of England, in formulating laws for the government of his people, adopted the Ten Commandments as the fundamental principle of his code of laws, and those commandments given to Moses on Mount Sinai have ever since been the fundamentals of the best laws of all civilized nations.

Until the year 1456 there were no printed Bibles and the manuscript copies were very rare, and it was the growing popularity of the Scriptures and the great demand for copies, that gave birth to the art of printing. It was the invention of Guttenberg that gave to the world its first printed Bible and it is proof of the high esteem in which the Scriptures were held that the Bible was the first product of the genius of Guttenberg and the art of printing. But even then the Bible was not available for the average man. Its cost was high and the supply was limited because of the crude and laborious methods of printing; and it was not until the reformation and Luther's translation that the Bible came within the reach of all; and thereafter a copy was found in almost every home in the Lutheran countries and found expression in the arts, music, sciences and crafts of those countries.

Since the reformation, the precepts of the Bible have inspired the best thought and stimulated the most wholesome activities of men everywhere in the civilized world.

It was the first printed volume. It is the world's greatest classic. It is at once the most valuable of all books and the cheapest. It is the world's best seller and hence the most popular of all books. It has been translated into more languages than any other volume. Thirty million new copies are put in circulation every year.

The precepts of this Book, the Ten Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount, the Golden Rule, the Beatitudes, the Proverbs, and the Gospels are the basis of the world's civilization; of its laws; its political and religious liberties; its beneficent institutions, and has been the inspiration of the best in music and art, in poetry and prose, in oratory and statesmanship.

Wherever the Bible has gone, it has ennobled manhood and exalted womanhood, dignified labor, banished human slavery, blotted out nameless sins, overthrown idolatry and paganism, and transfigured humanity. It has survived the rise and fall of Kings and Kingdoms. It has outlived the bitter attacks of atheists and agnostics and the shafts of so-called higher criticism, and the tests of science. It has confounded its enemies, triumphed over its enemies and is now more popular and a greater power for good, and greater comfort and inspiration in the lives of men, women and children than ever before in its history.

In considering the influence of the Bible and its value, our first thought naturally is of the Church which was founded upon its doctrines, and is the expression of its spirit and the medium of its influences upon the lives of men, women and children. The Church is the world's great moral as well as religious monitor, keeping society

within the bounds of reason, decency and good order. It stands like a great sentinel on guard over our homes and lives. The fruits of the Church and its ministrations as they relate to the State, the Community and the home, are temperance, virtue, charity, justice, righteousness, kindness, gentleness, courtesy and sympathy, obedience to law, respect for authority, loyalty to duty, devotion to country and its institutions, love of home and all the things that are good, true and wholesome.

Reliable statistics show that in communities where the Churches are strong and well supported, moral standards are high, and where the Churches are weak and poorly supported, moral standards are correspondingly lower. All men must concede the value of the Church from an economic point of view as a means of self-defense and for the protection and good order and happiness of our homes, families and neighbors.

But more important than these material and economic benefits, is the religious element which is the source of all good. The inspired word of God contained in this sacred book and the regenerating and saving power of the Gospel of Christ, have for centuries been transforming the hearts of men and women, and lifting them out of the slough of despond and despair, and cleansing them of sin and giving them new hope and courage, making their own lives and the lives of others useful and happy. Many millions have been redeemed and saved by the teachings of the Bible. They make drunken men sober, irritable men gentle, degraded men and women honest and pure, rob death of its sting and terror and the grave of its victory and send

multitudes with the glow of a heavenly smile on their faces singing into eternity.

The Bible through the agency of the Church and the influences of religion, visits the sick, feeds the hungry, clothes the naked, comforts the sorrowing and cheers the hopeless, and through its 300 missionary societies in this country and its more than 30,000 missionaries, sends the light of Christian civilization into the darkness of heathenism and makes the "desert places to bloom and blossom as the rose."

These are the same forces that inspire and stimulate men and women to give vast sums of money and much time and service to build, equip and endow hospitals, missions, schools, and homes for the aged. These are the influences that put it into the hearts of people to give and serve for the needy, the sick, the crippled, the orphan, the blind, the poor, the outcast and the fallen. The spirit that has made this in spite of the war and its consequences, the golden age of philanthropy and benevolence, the same spirit that has led our state in recent years to make provisions for the better and more humane care of its insane, its feeble minded and incurable people and helpless men and women and crippled children,—that moved the people of this state at the recent election, to appropriate \$50,000,000 for the better care of its unfortunate dependents,—the spirit that feeds the hungry and starving nations of Europe, even our enemies and those who would overthrow our government, the spirit that responded so promptly and generously for the relief of the stricken people of Japan,—the spirit that supports the Red Cross in its great work

for humanity everywhere,—these things are the manifestations of the love of God in the hearts of men and women.

Next to the Church in point of influence for good, stand our public and private schools, and they, in this country, had their origin in the Bible. “Happy is the man that findeth wisdom and getteth understanding.” “How much better is it to get wisdom than gold and to get understanding is rather to be chosen than silver,” so say the Proverbs. It was expressly declared in the general court of Massachusetts by which the first school was established in the American colonies, that it was done for the purpose of securing for the young a true interpretation of the Scriptures. The schools of our country in which 25 million of our boys and girls are being prepared for the duties and responsibilities of life, had their birth in the teachings of the Bible, and are to be counted in the sum total of its achievements.

The spirit of fraternity and brotherhood as it is cultivated in our many great fraternal organizations, and as it is exemplified in the lives of their members everywhere, is the outgrowth of the teachings of the Bible and the life and service of the great head of the Church, who went about doing good and who commanded that we should love one another and our neighbor as ourselves. There was no charity or benevolence or mercy or pity in the world before Christ came. Every man’s hand was against his neighbor and the world knew not the spirit of fraternity and brotherhood and He came heralded by the angelic chorus that sang out over the Hills of Judea, “Glory to God in the highest—on earth peace and good will toward

men," and He came not to be ministered unto, but to minister; and while there is much greed, selfishness, contention and hatred in the world, while "man's inhumanity to man" still makes countless thousands mourn, yet it is a blessed fact that the precepts of the Bible and the teachings of Christ are inculcated in the lives of millions of men in this country who are banded together by fraternal ties in organizations where belief in the existence of a Supreme Being is a prerequisite to membership, and where the Holy Bible is indispensable and is always open and read.

In the fraternity of Free and Accepted Masons, with its three million members in this country, the Bible is given as the rule and guide for our faith and practice. It is the great light in Masonry and in many lodges a copy of the Bible is presented to every new member. The masonic Bible is an infallible and unquestioned Bible. These great brotherhoods that are doing so much in the cause of fraternity, charity, good will, good morals and good citizenship, are the products of the Bible and are to be reckoned among its contributions to the civilization of the Twentieth Century.

What has been the influence of the Bible upon our National life?

We have been under divine guidance and leadership and protection from Plymouth Rock to this hour. The Pilgrims came here to establish their homes and build their Churches where they could worship God freely and accordingly to the dictates of conscience, and that is a right which was later written into our fundamental law and a right which every good American will concede to every man

of every race, faith and creed—the right to worship God in his own way and according to the rites and ceremonies of his own Church.

The compact made and signed in the Mayflower expressed the Pilgrim's faith and trust in God. The Peace Treaty of Versailles makes no mention of God. May that be a reason for its failure to bring peace to the world?

The Revolutionary patriots fought their battles for American Independence in the name of the Great Jehovah. The three greatest state papers in our country's history are the Declaration of Independence, Washington's Farewell Address, and the Emancipation Proclamation. The Declaration of Independence declares upon its face that it was made and signed with a firm reliance upon Divine providence for support and protection. Washington in his farewell address declared that religion and the Bible are indispensable props to political as well as individual prosperity which all men ought to cherish. Lincoln, in closing the Emancipation Proclamation, invoked upon his act the gracious favor of Almighty God.

Every session of the original constitutional convention was opened with a prayer. Every daily session of Congress is opened with prayer. Every national and state political convention is opened with prayer. Public officers in nation and state, upon the Bible and in the name of God promise to serve the people faithfully and well. The Sabbath day is recognized by law as a National Institution. We have just had our national thanksgiving by which we recognize God as the giver of every good and perfect gift. With the swearing of every witness, every day in all the

courts of the land, we make public acknowledgment of our faith in, dependence upon and accountability to Almighty God.

From our earliest history, the men who have contributed the most and the best in the building of our Republic, have been men of Christian character. Those whose names most adorn the pages of our country's history have believed in the Bible and tried to follow its precepts.

Andrew Jackson declared that the "Bible is the rock upon which our Republic rests." Washington at Valley Forge, praying for his ragged and starving army; Lincoln, leaving his old home and neighbors to take up the task of saving the Union, prayed to God for guidance and help; Garfield, upon hearing the news of the assassination of Lincoln from the steps of the Sub-treasury, declared that "God reigns and the Government at Washington still lives;" McKinley, in the throes and agony of death, uttering that prayer of resignation and submission, "It is God's way, His will be done;" Roosevelt, not long before his death declared that no community can long prosper that does not liberally support the Church and school; Harding, in one of his speeches just before his death, said, "I tell you my countrymen, the world needs more of the Christ. The world needs the spirit of the Man of Nazareth. If we could bring into the relationships of humanity, among ourselves and among the nations of the earth, the brotherhood that was taught by Christ, we would have a restored world and a new hope for humanity."

This religion which these great men put their faith and trust in, this religion that was present at the birth of our

Republic and is inwrought and interwoven into the very life of the nation, has made it what it is, with its liberties and splendid institutions, its opportunities and blessings, and has given it its character and made it the refuge and asylum of all nationalities, and the minister and benefactor of all needy and suffering peoples. This Bible and its teachings have made our Republic the world's great example in the art of successful self-government, the leader of the nations of the world and the hope of humanity. May these influences continue to guide us and make us and keep us friendly, unselfish, generous, charitable and helpful in all of our national and international relations, keeping before us always, the declaration of the Bible that "Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people."

The world needs more of this Book now and the practical manifestation of its spirit, the spirit of fraternity and brotherhood. The spirit of giving and doing for others, the unselfish spirit, the Christlike spirit to calm the passion and subdue the prejudices of men and classes and rulers of men and nations, and to bring peace and concord to a distracted and bewildered world.

We are suffering from the consequences of the war, and will for generations to come, from its terrible cost, mutilation, devastation and wreckage, from its shattering effects upon the world's commerce, credit, confidence and morals.

The world needs religion and the precepts of the Bible and the Gospel of Christ to cure its ills, heal its wounds, and calm and restore its shattered nerves. These are the only forces that can reach and regenerate the hearts of men, and transform their brutal, selfish and intolerant in-

stincts into the attributes of love, service and toleration.

The world has tried war and politics; ethical culture; social reform and moral uplift; peace treaties, and arbitration agreements. All good, some necessary, but none adequate to the needs of humanity; and we shall not have universal peace; we shall not have a world-wide brotherhood, not to be rid of race prejudices, class antagonisms, religious bigotry and intolerance; we shall not have harmony between capital and labor, nor a right and permanent solution of the problems that confront and disturb us until the forces of righteousness, the ministrations of love, the example of noble and unselfish service and sacrifice overcome and overthrow the forces of evil, greed, selfishness and intolerance; when men everywhere shall learn and practice and live by the Golden Rule, and shall do unto others as they would have others do unto them, our problems will all be solved and the world's troubles will be ended.

Then we shall have no more war or greed or graft or oppression or corruption or selfishness, which is the root of all our troubles.

“Then shall war and tumult cease
Then be banished grief and pain
Righteousness and joy and peace
Undisturbed, shall ever reign.”

THE WORK OF THE NEW YORK BIBLE SOCIETY

In the 114 years of the New York Bible Society's existence many millions of Bibles have been distributed, most of them without cost to the recipient—none at a profit. This great number of Bibles have been in nearly 60 languages, and in raised type for the blind.

The work of the Society is directed by a Board of 60 managers, members of Churches of the leading denominations. The Society employs workers to labor among the multitudes of the City, among the never ceasing arrivals at Ellis Island, the seamen in the harbor, the sailors and soldiers in the Service, among the sick in our hospitals, the inmates of our prisons, and among the blind. Over 60,000 Bibles have been placed in the guest rooms of New York City hotels. The work of the Society is strictly non-sectarian, and solely that of Bible distribution.

The Society is local in name only, for in reality it occupies a field national in scope. The vast resident population of many tongues, the throng of visitors from North, East, South and West, the tide of immigrants that pour in upon us from foreign shores, the seamen from every port on earth, are indicative of the field the New York Bible Society covers in its work. It is the only Society distributing the Bible among 80% of all immigrants arriving in America.

NEW YORK BIBLE SOCIETY

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