

THE UNIVERSITY AND THE BIBLE.



THE last word upon the relation of religion to education has not yet been spoken, and it is doubtful if it is soon heard. It is one of those questions which shows a tendency to recur after having been ap-

parently settled. A few years ago the most thoughtful educators acquiesced in the opinion that religion could not be taught in the public schools and colleges, and compromised upon a teaching of ethics. The State universities omitted religious services altogether; some of the older colleges retained the services, but reduced them to one each Sunday and made attendance voluntary. The tendency has been towards an exclusion or reduction of religious services and instruction as a factor of education, with an attempt to compensate for the loss by encouragement of religious guilds, prayer-meetings, and other voluntary services and forms of religious work among the students themselves. That is, the tendency has been to lessen the institutional teaching of religion and to substitute for it voluntary and undirected self-teaching. The cause of this tendency is not to be found in the preference of thoughtful educators, but in the practical difficulty of dealing with students of all beliefs and no beliefs, reinforced by a pervasive cry that religion has nothing to do with education. There is evidently a reaction from this tendency, and a disposition to reconsider the whole question. There are but few who are ready to dispense with religious services in the colleges, but the question with them is: Is the service to be regarded simply as a ritual of worship, or as a part of the education of the student? If it is the former, attendance should be voluntary; if the latter, it may be made compulsory. It is the unsettled state of this question that breeds the hesitation and confusion in which the subject is now involved. The substitution of the voluntary, self-directed efforts of the students in prayer-meetings and guilds of various sorts is so suggestive of the blind leading the blind as to exclude it as a factor in the problem. It may be well to foster such forms of Christian activity, but to make students teachers of religion to their fellow-students is to violate student nature if not human nature. It is a matter that needs to be most carefully watched and tested by its results—the good accomplished weighed and

compared with the danger attending the religious sentiments set to tasks for which they are not yet ripe. No amount of such work, valuable as it may be in some respects, can be a substitute for religious education, and the question remains in full force whether or not the college should attempt in any way to teach religion.

The system of voluntary attendance, as at Harvard and Cornell, is logically a negative answer, or at best makes it an elective study; but it asserts the wisdom of associating worship, or the ritual of religion, with education. It teaches religion for those who care to come, but the service is essentially a service of worship. It may be said, in passing, that in both universities the system is productive of good personal results, but it cannot be said for it that it is a serious and logical effort to teach religion. It is a worthy effort to teach such students as come under its influence to be religious, but this is quite different from teaching religion. The system of compulsory attendance, as at Yale and many other colleges, combines the idea of worship and the teaching of religion. The compulsory feature is based, not on the fact that students must worship, but that they must be taught religion. The conception is traditional and is involved in the nature of the colleges as Christian institutions. Practically it still works well, and by reason of pleasant chapels, cushioned seats, good music, short sermons, and a single service meets but little opposition from the students; their free vote would probably show a large majority in favor of compulsory attendance. The college student is a much more tractable being than he was a generation since. Then he led a life of chronic opposition to his instructors; to-day it is a life of manly and sympathetic coöperation, the great gulf of dignity having been bridged by common sense and the modern spirit. It may be questioned, however, if teaching religion by compulsory attendance is much more than formal—a sign merely that religion is respected and believed in. As a service of worship for arousing and feeding the spiritual nature, and for many other ends, it has great value; but it does little towards teaching the students the nature of that great fact which is called the Christian religion, for the simple reason that it is a service of worship, and cannot, from its nature, be an occasion of scientific instruction.

My point is this: the religious services in our

universities and colleges, whether attendance is voluntary or compulsory, should be regarded primarily and chiefly as for worship and spiritual ministrations, and should not be regarded as a means of educating the students in the nature of the Christian religion; with the inference that if there is to be such education it should be dissociated from worship, and conducted in the same thorough and scientific way as the study of Greek or history. That is, if religion is to be taught in the university, it should be taught in the class-room and for the single end of education.

The bare proposal to do this is sufficient to call out the protest of every sect not identified with the institution and a louder protest from those of no sect — all laboring under the delusion that the teaching of religion implies a purpose to make the students religious and to convert them to the special beliefs of the instructor. The protest, in one sense, does credit to those who make it, because it shows in what a personal way religion is regarded; but it overlooks the question whether one can properly be considered an educated man who does not possess a thorough and scientific knowledge of the great fact known as the Christian religion.

Education may be defined as a training of the mind by study of the laws of nature and of the chief forces, facts, and processes of human society. The university does not aim primarily to secure convictions on these subjects, but to impart accurate knowledge of them, leaving the student to form his own opinions. The very function of education is to teach a man to think for himself upon the basis of full knowledge, and it is the opposite of its function to seek to impart opinions and convictions as such. The teacher of political economy who strives to force his preference for free-trade or protection upon his pupils forsakes scientific ground. Facts, principles, results, not a crusade nor stump-speeches, form the elements of university education. So it will teach evolution, but it will not aim to turn out evolutionists. There is, of course, a personal element in education, and the personal convictions of teachers are not only not to be disguised but to be made clear; still, the method of impression should be sought through the facts and principles of the subject.

The time seems to have come, or is drawing nigh, when the Christian religion can be taught in this way; that is, as a fact and by the scientific method. It is an achievement of the last half of the nineteenth century that all subjects can be studied dispassionately and simply as objects of study; it is the triumph of the inductive method. The modern spirit in education no longer aims to

produce Protestants or Roman Catholics or sectarians of any name, or followers of any school of politics; its emphasis is transferred from this final field of conviction to the previous field of fact. Facts — their nature and relation — form the basis of modern education. Thus any great fact or force becomes a legitimate object of study, under the principle that right belief can only come from full knowledge.

As the great facts and forces of human society are those which an educated man must understand, it becomes a question whether he can claim to be such unless he has a thorough scientific knowledge of the Christian religion. A mere sense of proportion would suggest that of the three forces which have entered into civilization — the Hebraic, the Greek, the Roman — he should understand the first as thoroughly as the other two; or that he should have as thorough a knowledge of the Christian as of the heathen classics; or that he should get as clear an insight into the nature of the force which Christianity lodged in the Roman Empire, and by which it took possession of it, as he gets of the nature of the Empire itself. It is clear that education at present has no true proportion; there is no proper coördination of its studies, and as the result we get a set of one-sided, partial thinkers.

But proportion and fitness aside, we claim that an American scholar is not properly equipped for his high place and work in society who does not thoroughly understand the religion of his country. An able educator, who is also an accomplished statesman, recently asserted this, without question, to the writer, adding that such a person was not entitled to a degree, and inferring that attendance upon church should be compulsory. The inference may not be the wisest alternative, but it emphasizes the earnestness of the opinion from which it was drawn; it recognizes the fact that the religion of a nation is one of its strongest forces and cannot be left out of account in any sort of dealing with the people. No man can understand the people, or get on well with them, or influence them in a practical way, without understanding their thought in religion. There will be a wide space between him and them not to be bridged by mere observation of their habits, or by silence or formal patronage. He must know their religion as well as they do in order to understand them and come into that intellectual and practical *rapproch* which is essential to successful dealing with them. Many a public man stumbles at this very point, not being able to measure the largest and most influential factor in the lives and thought of the people with whom he has to do. It is

easy to see the bearing of this point by transferring our thought to another nation. If a worldly-wise infidel were doing business with Mohammedans in Damascus or Bagdad he would, as a first requisite, master the Koran and engage a kneeling-rug in a mosque. There is a great deal of what is thought to be shrewd patronage of religion by public men in our country which misses its end because it is supported by so little knowledge: they rent a pew, but they cannot outwit the deacon; they flatter the preacher, but fail to capture him if they miss the point of the sermon. But the question goes deeper. Every nation, whatever its character, is imbedded in its religion. Religion colors life, impregnates opinions, shapes thought and action; it is a spirit that possesses the people consciously or unconsciously. The educated man, the man who deals with a community in a thorough way and who undertakes to handle large masses of men, must know the people in these sources of their feeling and action. He may not share in their beliefs, but he must understand them; and he cannot understand them except by a study of them and their sources. I think it is impossible to name a great American statesman who was without a thorough knowledge of the Bible; it is possible to name a large number of third and fourth rate politicians as ignorant of it as the student at Harvard who recently called upon the librarian for *The Acts*, with no suspicion that it formed a part of the Bible — ignorance matched by the senior at Yale who had no knowledge of the historical person known as Pontius Pilate. Evidently the Harvard man did not attend the voluntary service and the Yale man did not listen to the sermons of the compulsory service. These cases are not so amusing — they are not so uncommon as may be supposed — as they are suggestive of the possible slips these university graduates may make in the future. The courtroom, the Board of Education, the halls of Congress, the drawing-room, will show them little mercy, and the sneer will include Alma Mater. It is simply a fact that no small number of men graduate yearly from our colleges who have less knowledge of the Bible than have the children of a mission Sunday-school.

A public man in a Christian nation who does not thoroughly understand the Bible is exactly analogous to the lawyer who is not well versed in the common law; he may know the statutes, the rules of evidence, the precedents, but, not knowing the origin and soul of the whole matter, he knows nothing.

The value of the Bible as a text-book of history, of political science, of ethics, of literature, of comparative religion, has so often been discussed that we pass it by, simply reaffirm-

ing our point that a man who aspires to influence over the people and fails to educate himself in the Bible misses an essential element of power in dealing with them. It is a truism that the secret of educated influence is superior knowledge of the subjects that engage and mold the popular mind.

While it is not a part of the duty of the university to shape its curriculum with a view to secure specific religious beliefs, it may be expected of it to avoid, so far as possible, the result of infidelity in its graduates. If the latter is the alternative of the present system, it would justify a thorough reconstruction of it, for no one will deny that our universities aim to reinforce the fact that this is and should be kept a Christian nation. *Christo et Ecclesie* is the jealously guarded legend upon the seal of the oldest university, and in the broad spirit in which it is cherished there is it read by all. But in the present confusion of the subject and in the condition into which it is fast drifting,—religious services, voluntary here and compulsory there, and everywhere reduced to a minimum, scanty both as worship and as teaching, pieced out by the voluntary meetings of the few more serious minded, with occasional exhortations from a bishop or a metropolitan divine, or a first-class revivalist, and with no thorough and scientific teaching of the facts and literature of the Christian religion,—the question is whether the university is not unwittingly playing into the hands of infidelity by educating its students away from the religious conceptions in which they were reared and at the same time failing to supply them with better conceptions.

The great universities like Yale, Harvard, Princeton, Cornell draw their students from all parts of the country. Many of them come from regions where crude, antiquated, superstitious, and bigoted views of religion prevail; some of them have been reared in and may be members of such churches. Indeed, one need not go outside of the great metropolis to hear from the pulpits of leading churches the emphatic assertion that the veracity of Jesus Christ, and consequently the whole system of Christianity, depend upon the belief that Jonah was swallowed by a great fish—the logic being that if this event did not take place Jesus was either ignorant or a liar. When a student who has been brought up under such instruction as this comes to college he outgrows it by the simple force of education; but not being taught the true significance of the Book of Jonah, he becomes an infidel so far as that part of the Bible is concerned.

The popular teaching of the doctrines is hardly less crude, and it is certainly widely

divergent and antagonistic. Whole sects depend for existence on a single text of Scripture, or some metaphysical notion, or some theory of interpretation, or some particular conception of heaven and hell, or on some mode of administering a sacrament; and none of them can be said to be, as a whole, broad and intelligent and catholic in the sense in which these words are used in the university. The preacher in the college pulpit may belong to the same denomination as that from which some of his pupils have come; but while he looks at the Bible in a very different way from the home-pastor, he is careful not to antagonize and uproot his teaching. This may be wise, for the simple reason that he cannot, with his limited opportunities, supplant it by a better teaching: he wisely reasons that any faith is better than none; but not the less is the student, by the very force of his education, thrown out of his former beliefs, or driven to carry them along with a sort of forced faith as too sacred to be wholly given up, but too weak and unreal to endure thought and discussion. Hence the fact that the most reticent class upon religion in American society are its educated men: not because, as Mendelssohn said, "religion and thorough bass are subjects too sacred for discussion," but because they do not know what to say; they have been educated away from the crude interpretations of the Bible which they everywhere meet, but have not been educated into an intelligent perception of it. The sympathies of these men are for the most part with religion; they see its ethical and social value; while in college they perceived that men of great learning, talent, and mental integrity held firmly to the Christian religion. Students hear from such men teaching in the class-room upon science, ethics, history, and philosophy, which, by inference, is in conflict with the popular exegesis and theology, but the reconciliation or explanation they do not hear. There is an unconscious feeling among them that the faith of the instructors is held in an esoteric way. Many of the students under such teachers as Dr. Woolsey and Dr. Hopkins confessed to their moral power over them, but would have been doubly strengthened if they could have heard some fuller explanation of the reasons for the faith that was in these men. The college student of to-day suspects, and he is not wrong in his suspicion, that his instructors hold opinions in regard to Genesis, the composition of the Pentateuch, and inspiration of which they do not speak. They are quite right in their reticence; no sensible man raises a doubt or question in the minds of young men unless he can explain or answer it. But a hint, an occasional sermon, a bare assertion, is insufficient to treat these grave themes;

they can be properly treated only in the class-room and as a subject of scientific study.

The situation is this: the student comes to college with a conception of the Bible such as no longer is held in the university — a crude, unscientific, antiquated belief which he has been taught to identify with the Christian religion. He undergoes education; his faculties are strengthened, his perceptions are broadened; he is taught to analyze, and compare, and question, and to think for himself; he becomes acutely perceptive of what is in the intellectual and religious air; he is, above everything else, taught to be rational. This very process leads him to relax his hold upon what he had been taught to consider fundamental, with the inevitable tendency to give up the whole Bible. His religious training says one thing, his education says another; caught between these two seas, he is liable to make shipwreck of his faith or to stick fast in the shallows of indifference. Some of the weaker sort return to their communities and relapse into an undiscerning assent to the exegetical crudities of their youth, or perhaps lead in the cry against modern thought and German rationalism. More live on, silent, puzzled, conforming outwardly, assenting to the ethical value of almost any church and creed, but sentimentally leaving "theology to the parsons." A college education does two good things: it teaches a man to speak, and it also teaches him to be silent. If the trained men in the pews of many churches were to speak their minds, the pastors and elders would often be greatly amazed. Some run the full logical length of the conditions of their education and announce themselves as confirmed agnostics. They unlearned in college what they had learned at home; they felt the presence of opinions on sacred themes which were not expressed, and so rashly jumped to the conclusion of unbelief.

The pity of all this is that the university is full of teachers who could withstand these tendencies and conserve the faith in their pupils: Hebraists, devout men of science, Christian philosophers, exegetes who are capable not only of translating but of reading a written document — a rare, perhaps the rarest of gifts, that of interpretation. These men would gladly undertake this work, but are withheld from it by public opinion on the ground that it is not their business to teach religion. Nor is it; but we may well ask if it should not be made their business to avoid sending out their pupils with a bias towards infidelity or agnosticism. The fault is not with the university, but with the people. Is it too much to expect that public opinion can be led to make a distinction between teaching religion

as a matter of conscience, with the view to securing specific beliefs, and teaching the Bible in a purely scientific way, with the view to finding out what it means and what it does not mean? In itself considered, there is no just reason why the Koran should not be made a subject of scientific study in college if it could be made subservient to the student in his future calling. It is entirely possible in teaching the Bible to set the matter of personal religion and specific belief aside, desirable as they are, and to place it upon the same ground as an analytic study of the Prometheus. The Bible can be taught as dispassionately, as critically, and in the same cold, dry, scientific light, as Homer or the Ptolemaic system. If it be said that this is not the best way to teach the Bible, that it should be taught warmly and sympathetically and urgently, we assent; but as it cannot be so taught in the class-room, let it be taught in the next best way, which is the scientific way—that is, by a process of investigation to ascertain its meaning. Such study may not lead to moral belief, but it will not impede it; it may not yield personal faith, but it will tend to ward off infidelity; and it will certainly send out men who know what the Bible teaches and what it does not teach. There is something of such study in Yale University, chiefly as an elective; and philosophy and ethics are so taught as to reënforce Christian belief, with the result of a less degree of skepticism in the senior than in the junior year—which prompts the question whether if there were more of such teaching skepticism could not be reduced to very low terms. But the college student does not become skeptical on philosophical grounds so much as through difficulties found in the Bible; Genesis, and not the Philosophy of the Unconscious, saps his faith. Hence his first need is of a scientific explanation of the sacred books.

There is now no public sentiment that needs to be regarded which complains of the scientific study of any subject. If in some regions and from some sources there should be complaint at treating sacred themes in a scientific way, it is a complaint that the university must be ready to meet and to endure. It will lessen as the conception, now rapidly growing, gains ground, that all education is conducted in the scientific or inductive method. The teacher who now wages a warfare in his class-room in behalf of free-trade, or protection, or evolution, is behind his age. The true teacher is one who gives the facts, the principles, and the laws of his subject. If it be said that such a theory of education reduces it to a cold and colorless thing, it may be replied that the true teacher puts the warmth and color into the facts and laws. He may hide

as much conviction as he sees fit within such teaching, but he must not contradict the very law of education—namely, teaching the student to think and giving him matter for thought.

This method can be carried into a study of the Bible. Objection might come from three sources—strict sectarians, who regard the Bible as a fetich too sacred to be touched except in their own way; atheists and infidels, who nourish a contempt for the Bible as an antiquated piece of rubbish; and the devotees of culture, who vary the monotony of their agnosticism by temporary zeal for Classicism, Buddhism, and, of late, Mohammedanism. To the first it may be said, We do not propose to undermine your sect, but to send your students back to you with a better knowledge of the Book that you revere. To the second it may be said, This is still a Christian nation, and the Christian religion is a real factor and power in the life of the people. We do not require your students to become believers, but we do require of them to become familiar with a fact and a force which they will meet at every turn in their future careers. To the third it may be said, It is not improbable that, in your varying enthusiasms, you will soon come to take an interest in the Babylonian myths, or in the psychic element in the Hebrew prophet, or in a comparative study of Oriental and Western symbolism, in which case a thorough knowledge of the Book most intimately related to these subjects would not be amiss.

In order not to leave the subject in a vague condition, I will indicate, or rather hint, the direction such scientific study of the Bible might take.

Genesis: the nature, sources, and composition of the book.

The Pentateuch: its authorship and composition.

The Hebrew commonwealth: its nature and growth.

An outline of Jewish history.

The nature and meaning of such books as the Song of Solomon and Jonah.

The theism in the Psalms.

The argument in the Book of Job, and its literary features.

The Proverbs, and their relation to Oriental thought.

The Captivity, and its effect upon the nation.

An analysis of the Prophecy of Isaiah, and its literary features.

An outline of the life of Jesus Christ.

The sources of the Christian Church as found in The Acts.

Christian institutions: their origin.

The forces in Christianity which led to its reception and continuance.