



IMPORTANCE OF BIBLE STUDY.

An Address Delivered Before the Sabbath School Institute, at Anderson, S. C., July 19, 1879, by J. Scott Murray, Jr.

(Published by Request of the Institute.)

It is difficult for us rightly to estimate and appreciate Sunday School work, and the influence exerted by it. The Sunday School is occupying a field that cannot be filled by any other instrumentality, with results equally beneficial.

Sometimes since, a gentleman with whom I was conversing told me that about thirty years ago, a member of a church, of which he was a member, in Laurens County, disconnected himself with it for six or seven years because a Sunday School was held in the house of worship.

There were many then who looked upon the Sunday School as antagonistic to the interests of the Church. But not so now. It is recognized as a most important instrumentality, in the hands of the Church, for educating and preparing the minds and hearts of those who attend it for the reception of Christianity.

Here youthful minds behold the dawning of that sacred light, flashing through heaven's gates, like the star that shone on Bethlehem's plains, leads to Him, on whom the hopes of a sinful world are fixed, to Him who in His tender humanity is God, and in His awful justice is merciful. And the maturer minds, stored with those precious gems of truth found in the Scriptures, reflect the glory of the Author of light, and are the caskets of His sacred treasures.

And those whose care it is to impart information are stimulated to study in proportion to the advancement of their classes, and by trying to impress others with the truths of the lesson have them impressed on their own hearts, in all their richness and fullness that study imparts. It seems to us a sad and lamentable fact, that the greater part of mankind must receive the views of their chosen leaders as the truth, however erroneous they may be, and that they do not investigate for themselves the subject which so much concerns them.

Yet, to study the Bible is a privilege and a duty which all of us should esteem and embrace, and for neglecting it we must give account to God, who has given us the Scriptures, which testify of Him. I suppose that the conversion of so many of the Bereans under the labors of Paul and Silas, after their work at Thessalonica, was the result, in large measure, of the study of the Scriptures; for we are told, in the 17th chapter of Acts that "they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so. Therefore many of them believed."

How many strange and erroneous doctrines, professedly taken from the Scriptures, could be preached from Sunday to Sunday without our ever searching them to see "whether those things were so!" We should encourage, in every way, to the fullest extent, the study of God's word. The word "search" does not mean to learn the answers to a few questions found in the uniform lessons or the question books, but it means to inquire diligently, to seek earnestly, to study thoroughly; and such study cannot be, as a rule, more successfully initiated and encouraged than in Sunday Schools. It ought to be done at home, but here none the less. It is not encouraged at home sometimes from neglect, and sometimes on account of incapacity to instruct; and it is filling these deficiencies that the Sunday School is efficient.

"Whatever is worth doing, is worth doing well," and if the Bible is worth studying at all, it is worth understanding. It is impossible to understand it without the study which the advanced classes in Sunday Schools try to initiate.

"Error like straw upon the surface flows, He who would search for pearls must dive below." The knowledge of which Solomon speaks is the pearl of great price, the reward of a studious, fervent and consecrated spirit; "the knowledge above all knowledge," without which, in this world, even a Byron is but mystery gazing upon mystery; genius confounded with grandeur; the inquirer searching the inscrutable; "Vanity of vanities!"

That belief which comes from a heart, full of the love and knowledge of the word of God, is the most sincere and intelligent of all beliefs, and will enable the Christian to say: "I know whom I have believed." The Bible classes in Sunday Schools ought to supplement our Theological Seminaries as far as possible. Whilst these seminaries are attended by a few, comparatively, the Sunday School is attended by many; the old as well as the young, ladies as well as gentlemen; and under the teachings there that character should be formed which can find companionship alone with purity and holiness. I once heard Dr. Tucker, of Georgia, say, in a sermon, "Religion is an affair of the head, of the heart and of the hands." The majority of those who are members of our churches were once Sunday School scholars, and if they studied well in the school they have an intelligent belief, and their religion is so far "an affair of the head." We need educated believers in the Christian warfare! We need the exercise of intellect and the power of study! The sword of Mahomet is rusting in its scabbard; the rod of the heathen is broken; and the Roman Janus of Catholicism is closed perhaps for ever. Yet, fancy's visionary speculations on morals will vanish before the bold and fiery logic of the infidel, and Christians must go upon the arena of intellectual strife and combat in the fight. "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit," saith the Lord of hosts. And if a spirit leads, the sword of the word must accompany.

"Life is real," and the best actors in its drama are those who have studied their parts well. But perhaps some one will say, Well, I will act in a tableau scene, and that doesn't require study. Think about it. Very few have the requisite qualities for a tableau picture, and you may come to the conclusion that you would appear on the stage in advantage in some other scene. In fact, there is no tableau here! We cannot be silent pictures! We are under the silent responsibility of moral action! And since we must let our lives be a lesson, let us study in the Sunday School which we may continue through all eternity; and let all commune through the word of God with holiness, and let the voices of earth and heaven accord, with sweet harmony, on the grand jubilate Deo of the people of God.

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With the little I had left I reached the McCully house exhausted and almost faint. The poor family were in great fear, and were passing around them, although as yet they had escaped all danger. My arrival was greeted with great joy. Mr. McCully, who had long been a paralytic, sat up in bed, and with a feeble smile, said to me, "The old grandmother, who was so severely afflicted, is now so well that she can do anything she likes." I was much surprised to find that she had been visited much more severely by cruel fate than I had.

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THE CRIME OF THE CENTURY.

A Vivid Picture of the Burning of Columbia.

Mr.