

Burroughs

Study of the English
Bible
in College

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The Study of the English Bible in College.

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I. ITS PURPOSE.

Bible study in college is a many-sided problem. It can be solved only by the cooperation of instructors, students and those interested in the moral and religious welfare of our institutions of higher learning. Moreover, its solution can be reached only by moving carefully along the paths of experiment and observation. Let him who entertains the most promising theories remain silent, until he has submitted them to the test of practice. What can be done is largely discoverable by noting what is being done.

First we ask, What should be the aim of college Bible study? The answer will greatly simplify matters. Its purpose can not be to divert the student from the Sunday pursuit of secular knowledge, while the in-

stitution withal reaps the benefit of a reputation for religious instruction and influence. Possibly the intimation of such an end may be thought unfair and misleading, a caricature of the religious teaching of some of our colleges. It may, however, I think, be contended that the outcome, if not the aim, of Bible study in the college may, to a considerable degree, be determined, in a given institution, by the view which the average student entertains concerning it. Without question, what it is accomplishing may be best ascertained by the practical results. Thus judged, it may be considered quite certain that a Monday morning exercise in the Greek Testament, or a recitation, either from a text-book or upon a Biblical lecture of the previous day, proves a doubtful experiment in reaching any result commensurate with that which is to be desired. Indeed an induction, exhaustive enough for the purpose, leads to the conclusion that the value of much that is called Bible study, in both school and college, can not be rated higher than a conscientious attempt to do something—which is after all often little better than nothing—toward meeting what is seen to be a pressing necessity. For it may be perti-

nently asked, are these weekly exercises sufficiently intellectual to command the respect of the students' mind for the sacred writings which are their subject? How do they compare with those other exercises, in the same institution, in which the training of the intellect or the imparting of exact knowledge is unquestionably aimed at? But it may be objected, in reply, that these exercises are not intended to be intellectual so much as devotional or practical. Very well. Are they, then, devotional, either in conduct or result? Do they inspire reverence for the source of Bible truth? Are they found imparting inspiration for righteous living? In a few instances, very possibly. But what of the majority of cases? The truth is, a college or school exercise which deals with the Scriptures should be either markedly intellectual or markedly devotional. The attempt to mix the two elements is calculated to produce something very dilute in character which is neither intellectual nor devotional, and which certainly is not practical. What indeed it is, it is hard to determine. A method which appears to be doubtfully successful in the Sunday school, is almost certainly doomed to failure in the college.

We ask, then, is the purpose of college Bible study simply a devotional use of the Scriptures? Should it aim only at the production of the worshipful spirit? Should its goal be found in reverential feeling? At once, let it be emphasized that the evoking of religious feeling, especially for a practical influence on conduct, is a high and important end of the study of the Scriptures, anywhere and everywhere. It is certainly to be sought in the college. But, how? Not only is it questionable whether it can be directly attained, but whether, indeed, it can be directly sought. To illustrate what I mean, let me refer to some instances of most successful use of the Bible in the college—a use, however, which ought not be called Bible study. In not a few institutions, classes meet—sometimes during the week, oftener on Sunday; in some instances without a leader other than a student, more frequently under the guidance of a professor—for such practical consideration of Bible truth as proves most helpful. It is to be noted that the success of these gatherings is in proportion to the previous knowledge of the Scriptures on the part of their members. In so far as it is necessary to turn aside, during the hour, from the

practical to supply the lack of the intellectual, the result is marred. In other words, the intellectual is the foundation upon which the practical structure is reared; it is, also, the material out of which this structure, if at all substantial, is fashioned. Now, if we could but assume, in the case of the young man entering college, an understanding of the Bible in any degree commensurate with his knowledge of other subjects, the situation would be quite other than it is. Under such circumstances, the problem of the Bible in the college would be entirely different in character, and much less complicated. But such an assumption is out of the question. The fact is, there is not sufficient knowledge of the Scriptures among our college students, themselves being judges, to admit of extensive and thoroughly successful devotional or practical Bible study. An understanding of this fact makes clear what has been, and is, a puzzle to outside friends interested in the religious welfare of the college. Why, it is asked, do various plans for devotional and practical use of the Scriptures, which in theory seem so workable, fail in college practice, so soon as their novelty has worn off. The explanation is not found in the fact

that college students are "so changeable," but in the sadder fact that they are deficient in intellectual grasp of the Bible. This deficiency they bring with them into the college life; the causes of the situation and the responsibility for it are to be sought outside the college. Where lies the fault? With the home? With the Sunday school? With the preparatory school? Or with all these together? Be the reply what it may, the college must do what it can to remedy the defect. It must try to do what ought to have been done long before. It must aid the student in obtaining a knowledge of what the contents of the Bible are.

What has been said, however, justifies a prompt negative reply to the inquiry as to whether the purpose of College Bible study be simply an intellectual grasp of the Scriptures. It is, of course, true that such knowledge as the mind may attain regarding the Bible is an end worthy to be aimed at in a college training. To desire simply to know the Scriptures is a good motive—and also a high one—for entering upon their study. But it is evident that the present situation demands intellectual study of the Scriptures, especially as a means to the use of the volume

for the up-building and the maintenance of the moral and spiritual character of the individual student. It demands it for such a use not only during the college days but throughout life, for which, in this respect as well as in others, these college days should be a preparation.

Thus do we arrive, from a study of the existing situation, at the answer to our inquiry. *The purpose of College Bible Study should be intellectual knowledge of the Scriptures, not as an end in itself, but as a means, all-essential, to their practical use, throughout life, in the up-building and maintenance of moral and spiritual character.*

II.—ITS PURPOSE HOW BEST ATTAINED.

The inquiry arises, Will a class, gathered on Sunday, under the direction of a competent instructor, with the intention of emphasizing the intellectual element in the study of the Scriptures, meet the end in view? In other than a college community, this might seem quite feasible. But here peculiar difficulties are met, in that intellectual pursuits are every-day duties and make up the staple of life. The faithful student, therefore, needs a day of mental rest on Sunday, while the

less ambitious one will be quite sure to take it, as far at least as Bible study is concerned: the former ought not expend the mental energy requisite to the success of the exercise, the latter will be little inclined to do so. Moreover, a competent instructor is not so readily secured. No task is more arduous than Bible teaching in college: it can not be taken up as a pastime. In all likelihood, the professor best calculated to achieve such success as may be possible under the circumstances, needs his rest-day even more emphatically than the most faithful student who may take up the study. Moreover, the best qualified teacher soon finds so many special difficulties attendant upon the work, that the amount of preparation required becomes a burden well-nigh too great to be borne. If it be thought that this preparation may be scattered through the week, and thus the difficulty, so far certainly as the student is concerned, be greatly lessened, it must be remembered that in most institutions each day's duties are fully proportioned to the time and ability of at least the average student. At all events, I have yet to find either the earnest and judicious Christian student or the professor who, face to face with the situation,

advocates that such intellectual mastery of the Bible as the college student needs, be sought through a voluntary, or through a required, Sunday exercise.

Increasingly, therefore, it is becoming evident that such study as is necessary can only exist as it finds a place for itself in the college curriculum. Here again, it is true, embarrassments are at hand. No make-shift work, of course, will be of service, whether occurring Monday morning or any day and hour of the week. Time for thorough preparation and thorough instruction must be allotted from the regular work of the college; and time is what each department of existing instruction is already seeking for itself in larger measure. The only way of meeting the difficulty would seem to be to show, in actual practice, that work which demands time and which, considered as a mental discipline alone, is worthy of the time demanded, can be done by the student. And here another obstacle suggests itself. To carry on successful work which shall thus show, by its results, both its need and its value, is not possible for any instructor who is the incumbent of an existing chair of instruction, calling for its own specific duties. To divide

the work among several teachers increases, instead of diminishing, the embarrassment. For there must be unity in the teaching: one mind must plan, direct and execute. There must be one method, inspired by an undivided personality. In but one way can the situation be met. Special professorships of Biblical instruction must be founded and filled with men fitted by natural endowments and special training to carry on this difficult yet important work. Little can be accomplished until this step is taken. Already two or more of our leading institutions have such chairs. Other institutions feel their need and are plainly saying so. Thoughtful and generous benefactors must see to it that no institution of importance as a center of education is left destitute in this particular.

How then shall Bible study, as a part of the curriculum, under the direction of a competent and efficient instructor, devoting his entire time to the task, be carried on? This question must be answered in each individual case according to the circumstances. Each of our colleges has its own peculiar individuality. Each has its own traditions, its own methods, mutually adjusted, of thought and

work. Each has its peculiar mission to society. To attempt, therefore, to answer in any abstract fashion, what shall be the line along which a given department of instruction shall be conducted in every institution in whose curriculum it may share a part would be the height of absurdity. Peculiarly would this be so regarding a department of Bible study. For many questions at once suggest themselves. Shall this study, for example, extend throughout the course or shall it be confined to certain classes, and shall these be the lower or the higher? Shall the study be required or shall it be elective? Or shall it be required for the lower classes and elective in the case of the higher? Again, what as to the method of instruction? Shall it be uniform for all classes or so varied in character as to be adapted to the stage of mental development attained by the student at a given time? It is very evident that common sense and experiment must answer these queries according to the situation in each particular case. Certain things will, however, I believe, be found true in general everywhere. Certain principles, therefore, as we may perhaps call them, may be laid down, the application and illustration of which are the privilege of the

teacher in each individual case. Let me briefly indicate a few of these.

First, the work should be made as thoroughly a means of mental discipline as any other part of the curriculum. Painstaking, accurate, thorough scholarship should be expected and required by the teacher. The work should be as exacting and exhausting as any other study occupying an equal portion of time. Bible study, so called, has been, in the past, made easy. The result has been demoralization and degeneracy, not only in the matter of the mastery of the Scriptures, but also, indirectly, in the general tone of scholarship in the institution where the evil has existed. Let the study be made a difficult one and the best results may be anticipated.

Second, Bible study, as a part of a college curriculum, should be conducted from the points of view of history and literature. True, philosophy and social science are also to be legitimately found in the Scriptures, and legitimately are these to be drawn from them; but, first of all, the Sacred Library must be studied with the historic and literary sense; otherwise all further work is vain. The teacher, therefore, must be one possessed of aptitudes, at least, for instruction in both

history and literature. The wider his researches in these fields and the more manifold his resources as the result, the better. The student also must have attained such a degree of mental development, that a personal insight into historical movements and some intuitive perception of literary forms may reasonably be expected of him. Indeed, no adequate Bible study can be engaged in until the scholar has had some previous training in the study of history and literature, at least in their English and American manifestations.

Third, the same general considerations which would influence the allotment of time, together with its arrangement, in the case of any other college discipline, should prevail regarding this one. Who would think of extending a course of philosophy or of social science through the four years of a college course as a weekly Monday morning exercise? Who would advocate such an arrangement for a course in history or literature? That this has been a method much in vogue in Bible study only shows the point of view from which the Bible in the college has been regarded. Without question, it has been primarily considered a matter of religious and devotional concern; it has not been, to

any marked degree, thought of as a mental discipline. Increasingly, in preparing a schedule of exercises for a given college term, the tendency prevails to “bunch” the hours of a given study. Better results can unquestionably be thus obtained. It would seem far better, therefore, to permit a student to study the Bible during a single term of a college year, allotting from two to four hours a week to the exercise, than to make the study a weekly exercise throughout the year. If so much time can be commanded for the subject, a four-hour course, extending through one term, might well be arranged, either as required or elective work, for each class. And if the example of other disciplines be followed in this particular also, it might be quite proper to expect that the work at the outstart should be required and later on become elective.

Fourth, and most emphatically, Bible study, as demanded by our colleges at present, should be scientific in character. Its method must be inductive. Its highest form, for most advanced work, should be the laboratory or German seminary system of instruction. Its lower forms should approximate, so far as may be, to this. The great object of the dis-

cipline is to develop independent and original students of the Scriptures. The general road, therefore, to this goal must be that universally accepted to-day as the proper one along which to proceed in the effort to produce original scholars in the sciences, while the special pathway may well be that method which is increasingly meeting with large success in the pursuit of the historical sciences, to which Bible study certainly belongs.

III.—BIBLE STUDY IN AMHERST COLLEGE.

Only as we consider college Bible study from the point of view of existing conditions, can we make actual advance toward the solution of what is confessedly a question of utmost importance and peculiar difficulty. In this concluding paper, the facts stated concerning Bible study in Amherst College are to be regarded simply as so much *data* for further thought and experiment.

It will be necessary, at the outstart, to emphasize the distinction, already incidentally alluded to, between the use of the Bible in religious instruction in college and college Bible study. Repeated conversations with those interested in the subject and experience with the student in the class room have led to

a sense of the imperative need of discriminating between Bible-*listening*, Bible-*reading* and Bible-*study*. Confusing the two former, in their place valuable and important, with the latter, has, perhaps, done more than anything else to conceal genuine need and to hinder genuine progress. Much religious instruction may be given, much use of the Bible exist, where, in reality, no Bible study is found. It is not purposed in the present paper, to speak of religious instruction in Amherst College—this were another and far wider theme—, but simply to deal with the *study* of the Scriptures in the institution.

In the beginning of its history Amherst planned for Bible study. The first printed statement of its course of instruction includes “a critical recitation in the Greek Testament, once a week, during a part of the year, for each of the classes.” Five years later, a weekly exercise, for each class, in the English Bible was made a part of the curriculum. The Freshmen studied the historical books, the Sophomores the prophetic, the Juniors the N. T. Epistles, the Seniors the Assembly’s Catechism in connection with the Scriptures. By far the larger part of the faculty participated, in turn, in the instruction of the three

lower classes, while the president took charge of the work with the Seniors. The hour of instruction for all was assigned to Thursday afternoon, in order, thus, to bring religious influences into the mid-week. Evidently a devotional result was the end specially sought. Later on, this arrangement was so modified, as regards the three lower classes, that each professor taught something in, or concerning, the Scriptures kindred to his own department. At this period Bible-listening was taking the place of study on the part of the students and lecturing that of active class instruction on the part of the teacher. The difficulty of finding instructors who could and would conduct these exercises with profit, the comparative inutility of a single meeting with a class during the week, together with the fact that all work, on the part of the student, in preparation for the exercise, had disappeared, led to the gradual abandonment of this plan of instruction, until the only Bible study remaining in the curriculum, except the Catechism and Bible exercise with the Seniors, was that of the Sophomores and Juniors in the Greek Testament. The former passed, with the Greek professor, in consecutive lessons, through a

gospel or the Acts, the latter through one of the epistles. Finally, this also was, for good reasons, omitted. Meanwhile, another force for religious instruction in the college had begun to make itself felt. A professorship in Biblical history and interpretation having been founded, the president became its first incumbent, and, in connection with his conduct of the regular morning prayers, consecutive Bible readings and expositions, necessarily limited as to time, were carried on. Subsequently this professorship was separated from the presidency, and, although still connected with the college pastorate, opportunity has been afforded through it for the reëstablishment of a systematic course of Bible study, as a part of the regular instruction of the college, quite unlike, however, in character and manner of conduct, that pursued in the early history of the institution. It should be understood, that, aside from this classroom work, a use of the Bible, separate from stated religious exercises, exists at present in connection with the religious life of the college, wisely varying in character from year to year, such, for example, as a Sunday evening Bible exercise, open to all classes, exercises at the close of the Sunday morning service

for students of individual classes or for the college as a whole, and private gatherings, of small numbers of students, for Scripture reading and practical application. These ought, however, to be placed under the heads of Bible-listening and Bible-reading, inasmuch as there has been found to be little or no study on the part of students, otherwise interested and faithful in attendance.

The present development of Bible study in the curriculum may be largely attributed to the earnest request of students of the upper classes that time for such study might be allotted to those who desired it from the other work of the college, and that this study in its methods and its thoroughness might be placed on a level with other studies of the last two years of the course. The insufficiency of the results attained in the work attempted on Sunday, doubtless, contributed largely to the request. An elective, of four hours a week, running through the winter term, and open to Juniors and Seniors together, was the first step taken. The work was so planned that a different course should be presented alternate years. The first year O. T. history, poetry and prophecy were studied in selected books and also certain of the N. T. epistles.

The aim of the O. T. work was largely to show the prophet in his historical setting and the historic progress of O. T. religion under his guidance. At the same time, the literary form in which his deeds and words have been transmitted to us commanded careful attention. The Semitic genius and the theocratic elements in O. T. literature were considered. Personal peculiarities of temperament and education, and their expression in the language employed, were noted. Back of the book was seen the living man, thinking, moving, a great factor not only in Hebrew, but also indirectly and subsequently, in world progress. The study of the N. T. epistles, pursued along the same general lines, was designed to give an insight into the personal elements in the development and history of primitive Christianity, together with a careful consideration of the points of contact between this new life and the older religious civilizations, Jewish, Greek and Roman, among which it found the soil for its growth and its place of influence. The second year of the course was devoted to the historical and literary study of the Gospels, with the attendant problems. The synoptic Gospels, the question of their literary similarities and

differences, their relation of dependence upon one another and their relative date, their authorship, genuineness and authenticity, including the question of the supernatural historically considered, occupied attention first. Then followed the study of the Fourth Gospel, at first by itself, along the same lines, subsequently in comparison with the synoptics. Thus the whole field of early Christianity was passed over, the foundation for the study having been laid in the investigation of the epistles, especially the four undisputed Pauline ones, the previous year.

Soon, however, it was manifest that much better results could be obtained by separating the Juniors and Seniors, permitting the former to elect work in the Biblical history and prophecy, together with the epistles, and opening the critical study of the Gospel to Seniors alone. The influence of the studies of Junior year, especially those of English literature and history, was found very helpful in connection with the former course, and considerable progress in these quite desirable as a preparation for the latter. Moreover, the qualities of mind developed by such Senior studies as political economy, constitutional history and philosophy were seen to be very

helpful in the work of Gospel criticism. Thus two separate terms of work, of four hours each, were opened, the one for Juniors only, the other for Seniors alone, while, in all ordinary cases, no one would be expected to take the work of the Senior elective who had not previously taken the Junior course. This division of the study, which is the existing condition at the present, has led to some modifications in the work of both years. While naturally the Junior work is prefaced by remarks on method, and practice work making certain the student's understanding regarding it must be done at the threshold, these can be omitted Senior year. Moreover, there is now opportunity for the profitable giving of supplementary lectures, applying, in their larger relations, the facts and principles which the student is discovering and putting into practice in his own personal inductive work. The lectures cover in the Junior year the entire field of O. T. literature giving a fair survey of the ground, although certain questions, as for example that of Pentateuch criticism, can not be entered into in detail. Little, if anything, however, is lost here, as the student at this stage is not fitted to handle such a problem, nor, in the opinion

of the writer, are final results yet clearly enough attained or formulated to permit of its profitable consideration at any length in a college course. In the Senior year, the lectures deal with the entire N. T. literature, the development, historically viewed, of apostolic Christianity, the personal and historical factors tending to the unity, while rendering necessary the variety, of Christian thought and practice in the first days. Thus many subjects for further investigation are marked out before the student and the lines along which they may be approached are indicated. He is taught to believe that he is to be throughout life an independent, yet humble, investigator of truth as it presents itself in living form in the literature of the Scriptures, and to find in the Christ its highest and complete personal manifestation.

But it must be emphasized that these lectures are supplementary; they presuppose and rest upon the personal inductive work of the student, which is the essential part of the course. This requires some extended explanation.

First, as has been stated, the characteristics of inductive Bible study are emphasized in introductory lectures, and practice work is

assigned each student, in the doing of which he is most carefully watched and searchingly criticised. The class then begins to apply what has been thus learned to a single book, characterized by unity and limited in scope. The revised version is the single text-book, the student being encouraged in N. T. work to make constant comparison with the original Greek. The special book selected is studied by paragraphs; the contents of a given paragraph are concisely stated in writing, occasionally its condensed sense is written out; thus by generalization the scope of the book as a whole is determined. This work is daily submitted to the instructor. Meanwhile, questions of importance are, as they occur to the student, briefly noted and classified. Next, an inductive study, prepared by the teacher, is put into the hands of the student. It consists entirely of questions, standing in close connection with one another and intended to bring out the leading thoughts and topics of the book, thus preparing the student to appreciate its marked individuality. While this study is being worked through and the results are being submitted to the teacher, the time in the class-room is occupied with a brief survey of the book,

paragraph by paragraph, following after, but never preceding, the inductive study, and consideration is given to the most important questions which have been raised by the students individually. After the inductive study has been completed, a list of topics, suggested by it, is submitted to the class; a given one is assigned to each student for personal investigation, a thesis upon which, short and concise, is the goal of his work upon that individual book. Interviews are had with each student privately regarding his topic; suggestions are made and inquiries answered. While the theses are in preparation, the bibliography bearing upon the topics as a whole is treated, and the supplementary lectures, which have been described, proceed. Upon these matters, written recitations are held at least once in two weeks, and in these the student is encouraged to present freely his own views and any difficulties which have occurred to him along the line of his personal research. These difficulties are met in private conference with each student. The theses, when completed, are read before the class and each is criticised by the teacher in private, general criticisms only being given in public.

Of course only a limited number of books can be taken up in this exhaustive way, yet after the first has been handled, the work becomes much more rapid. In the Senior year but four, the Gospels, are to be considered; in the Junior year four to six, according to their size, may be passed through by each student; but these will be representative books, e. g. in prophecy Amos or Micah, in the epistles Galatians or Romans. The class is generally divided this year, after passing over the first book, into two or more sections, each working a separate book. Thus the results of work upon eight or twelve books at least may come before the class in the theses. In moving from book to book, comparative study is insisted upon; thus the conception of the organic character of Biblical literature is brought out and the development of revelation in historical movement and inward experience is seen.

What students elect such work? Generally those who are good scholars in other departments. Not alone those who are professing Christians; by no means those only who are looking forward to the ministry. These are always in the minority. They may postpone their Bible study for the theological course;

others can not. With these it must be a part of the college course or something, in most cases, never done. Inquiring minds are attracted; those who have religious difficulties are often met with. This is well. It is better to meet a difficulty squarely and with help than to evade it or struggle with it alone. Students of literary and historical tastes are specially attracted. In number, from twenty to twenty-five per cent. of a given class are found to elect the study.

What are the observed results? Increased respect for the wealth of beauty and the power of truth found in the Scripture literature. Increased humility before great subjects, whose magnitude and difficulty are clearly seen. It is not easy, after passing through the course, to decide against the Bible or Christianity in an off-hand way. Increased reverence for the personalities of Bible history, profound reverence for the Christ. Fortified, intelligent Christian faith; a mind open to the evidence of experimental religion. Increased reading of the Bible in private; increased devotional appropriation to self of the life which it contains. These results are not the opinions of the instructor, but of students themselves.

It is hoped in the near future to extend the course yet more fully, opening it to at least one, if not to both, of the two lower classes. This would involve other changes and modifications. But these are in the future. Only what has been already done is of value for the working out of our problem, the study of the English Bible in the college.

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