THE DIVINE LIBRARY—ITS ABUSE AND USE,
OR HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE.

BY DR. WILBERT W. WHITE.

Sir Arthur Blackwell's quartette of words excellently summarizes all good advice about Bible study. They are these: Admit, Submit, Commit, Transmit. The quintessence of the teaching of the learned and godly Bengel on Bible study is given in one sentence, thus: "Apply thyself wholly to the text; apply the text wholly to thyself."

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE ABUSES OF THE BIBLE?

The Bible not difficult to understand. To regard the Bible as a book difficult to understand is a common misconception of it. "The Bible is not a riddle but a revelation." It has been given to show the way of life. It is the history of salvation. The great essentials of its teaching may be easily grasped. True, there are some things in the Bible which are hard to be understood, which the unlearned and unsteadfast wrest to their own destruction. But the Bible as a whole is a plain book intended for plain, common people, and is to be understood in a plain, common-sense way. Persons who reject the Bible because they think it hard to understand, or because there are so many things in it which they do not believe, should try reading it for the truths which they can understand and will heartily, without hesitation, accept as true, never forgetting the fact that obedience to known truth is a prime requisite to advancement in knowledge.

"Light obeyed increaseth light;
Light rejected bringeth night."

Flippant Bible study. To cheapen the Bible in any way is an abuse of it. Going to the Bible to point a joke, or using broken texts, as I have heard has been done in young people's
social gatherings, for the sake of selecting partners for the evening, is an abuse of it. We want no bibliolatry, no worship of a book, but in this irreverent age let more reverence for the Word of God dwell in us. We would do well to put Mr. Gladstone's favorite motto into our collection of proverbs: "Early and provident fear is the mother of safety."

Indirect
Too much indirect or second-hand Bible study should be avoided. Taking too continuously the results of the study of others is a mistake. Horace Greeley's famous remark about the resumption of specie payment may be recalled here. Said he: "The way to resume is to resume." So we say: The way to be acquainted with the Bible is to study not so much books about the Bible as the Bible itself.

Exclusive
On the other hand, refusal to use any helps in Bible study is a mistake. Some people carry this so far as to confine themselves to a single version of the Bible. There are those who repudiate the use even of the Revised Version. I have heard tell of a deacon who said that if the Authorized Version was good enough for St. Paul it was good enough for him. It is mere arrogance and pride to refuse to consider what God has taught other men. This principal strictly applied would prevent one even from listening to an expository sermon, for what is the difference between reading a book in explanation of the Bible and hearing one speak in explanation of it? The Bereans heard Paul preach, and "searched the Scriptures whether these things were so."

Mr. Sprague has well said, "Two opposite errors beset the student of the Scriptures. The tendency to take everything at second-hand from others, and the refusal to take anything from others."

Penal
To require oneself or another to read a portion of the Bible as a penalty for some wrongdoing, or in mere fulfillment of a pledge, is an abuse of the Bible. I know of one who, when a little girl, was compelled on one occasion to take a dose of castor oil with milk, and as a consequence throughout a long lifetime hated the very sight of milk. There are people who have been prejudiced for life against the Bible because of its association with punishment. In others this has resulted in a careless, thoughtless and consequently profitless reading of the Bible. The Bible is not to be read as a book in itself, but as a means to an end; not as an act of piety, but as an aid to piety. Mr. Moody once illustrated perfunctory and superficial Bible study by telling how a certain boy used to hoe corn. When he left the field for the night his work was so poor that he said it was necessary to mark the place so he could tell where to begin the next morning. Says Dr. Stalker: "The Bible will richly repay study, but only if the conditions are observed which common sense dictates. It has no power of working like a charm so that a chapter can be read in a few minutes with a preoccupied mind to much profit. The mind must rest upon it, give itself time to receive impressions. It requires the whole force of our thinking and the whole force of our feeling."

Magical
Closely allied to the foregoing is what may be called the magical use of the Bible. Some people use the Bible as though it were a charmed book. They think that to have it in the house is a protection, and when they turn to it some will go to the length of throwing it open with the determination that they will take the first verse they fall upon as the answer to the problem at hand. What would you think of a hungry man who, finding his way to a grocery, "I am very hungry, I mean to eat the first thing I set my eyes upon when I reach the place"? Suppose that upon entering, the first thing that he should see would be a bar of soap? The Jews of our Lord's time made the mistake of thinking that in the Scriptures which they searched (which is more than people about whom we have been thinking do), they had eternal life. Making this mistake, they would not come to the Lord Christ in order that they might have life.

The Bible is to be treated like any other book in this respect; that we may expect satisfactory results from it only as we apply our minds to it as we do to other books. Intellectual effort is not incompatible with true piety and the deepest spirituality. Indeed, it is essential to it, for all profitable meditation upon the Word of God involves a mental grasp of its truth. Because the Bible is more than mere literature it is more than mere history: it none the less runs its root down into and is related to all ancient history. The truth in the
Bible was not conveyed without mental and spiritual travail on the part of those to whom it first came. Nor will it be re-revealed without effort on the part of the recipient. God has provided in the giving of His revelation that those who seek shall find, that in the sweat of his mind and spirit man shall eat mental and spiritual food. Bring then to the Bible no less mental effort than you are willing to give to secular books. Remember that there is no royal road to Scripture knowledge. While it is most true that "the attitude of the soul is more important in Bible study than methods," there is no reason why a soul in the right attitude should not use the best methods. The Bible is too commonly known as a mere book for texts. It is in truth the greatest text-book in the world. Certainly Emerson was not prejudiced in favor of the Bible when he wrote: "The most original book in the world is the Bible. Shakespeare, the first literary genius of the world, leans on the Bible. His poetry presupposes it. People imagine that the place the Bible holds in the world it owes to miracles. It owes it simply to the fact that it came out of a profounder depth of thought than any other book." Do not, therefore, put mere snippets of time on the Bible when your mind is dull and then ask why it is not interesting. Give it a fair chance with other books; give it even the time you spend on your newspaper and see what it will yield.

Rationalism Another abuse of the Bible is to regard it as a book which may be fully understood by mere intellectual effort. If it is an abuse not to treat it like any other book it is an equally flagrant abuse to treat it exactly like any other book. As "no prophecy of Scripture is of private interpretation"—i.e., mere personal opinion or impulse; as "no prophecy ever came by the will of men, but men spake from God being moved by the Holy Ghost"; as this Book contains Spirit-breathed information, it follows that it can be properly understood only by the aid of the same Spirit. It is literally true of every Scripture that it is in the present profitable for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, only when it is inspired by God, that is when it is breathed into the student's soul and borne in upon his life by the ever-present Holy Spirit. Much of the Bible study of to-day is not worthy the name, because it is so exclusively intellectual. Such Bible study does not lead to more of reverence nor to greater purity of life, and by this rule it is our duty to judge of Bible study. In Bible study let the best mental effort be put forth, and the best methods be employed. Use all grammars, lexicons and exegetical works, but never let the absolute necessity of the illumination of the Holy Spirit be lost sight of. Rationalistic Bible study is an abuse of the Bible, because it makes the unaided human understanding the measure of acceptance of the teaching of the Bible. The offense of the Bible always has been the presence in it of the supernatural. The Bible comes to us with claims which it distinctly tells us will be rejected by the unspiritual. The fact that many educated persons reject the Bible is no evidence that it is not true. If the evidence of its truth were obtainable by the same processes and under the same conditions by which the evidences of scientific truth are obtainable, it would be, but we have no reason to expect it otherwise. Those who are not enlightened by the Holy Spirit have not the organs of vision. "Who among men knoweth the things of a man save the spirit of man which is in him. Even so the things of God none knoweth save the Spirit of God." "Things which eye saw not and ear heard not, and which entered not into the heart of man, <span class="redacted">unto us</span> God has revealed through the Spirit. For the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God." "The natural man receiveth not the things which are of God, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. The cross is to the Jews a stumbling block, and to the Greeks foolishness, but to them which are being saved it is the power of God and the wisdom of God." (See I Cor. 2.)

The presence and cultivation of the spiritual life is an essential element in understanding, and as a consequence in maintaining faith in the Word of God. The supernatural element in the Bible is its strength; its unreasonableness, not its unreasonableness, is its glory. Too many in our day are treating the Bible much as a claim at a Dutch auction treats the articles which he offers for sale. If no one will give the price he first names, he offers it for less, and an article which in most eloquent language he declares at first worth five dollars he will knock off to the first bidder for fifteen cents. Let us resist the effort to bring down the Bible to the level of man's comprehension, for this can never be done. Make it cheap as you will, and man will refuse to accept it. It is by declaiming to diminish that it is commended. Lincoln's advice written to
Joshua Speed about a year before his lamented taking off might well be heedled to-day: "I am profitably engaged in reading the Bible. Take all this Book upon reason that you can and the balance on faith, and you will live and die a better man." Bible study is gold mining. In this mine it is necessary not only to have a pick, but also a lamp. Martin Luther was a most diligent and capable student in the sense of being able to apply his mind and to acquire knowledge. In reply to his friend, Spalatin, who inquired after the secret of his knowledge of the Scripture, he said: "It is very certain that we cannot attain to the true understanding of Scripture by study or by intellect. Your first duty is to begin by prayer, entreating the Lord to grant you of His grace, mercy, and understanding of His Word, so as to discern the meaning there is in no interpreter to this Word, as he himself hath said. "They shall all be taught of God." Hope for nothing from your own labors, from your own understanding. Trust solely in God and in the influence of His Spirit. Believe this on the word of a man who has had experience." With these sentiments Catherine Booth, the mother of the Salvation Army, was in sympathy when she wrote: 'The longer I live the more I believe in the study of the Bible with the Spirit. It is dead without.'

The wise mariner guides his ship both by the lighthouse on the shore and by the stars of heaven. So in the ocean of the Bible should we direct our course by both the light of reason and that of the Holy Spirit.

Unsympathetic Bible Study. It is proper in this connection to re-emphasize the necessity of obedience in the student of the Bible. It is no use to study the Scriptures for more light or expect the Holy Spirit to illuminate His page if you are not living up to the light which you already possess. The student of the Scriptures must seek to know more in order that he may do better, not simply in order that he may have more intellectual equipment. Many seek to master the Bible and do not regard the necessity of allowing the Bible to master them. Our Lord's words, "He that is minded to do the will of God shall know of the teaching," involve the principle which we have in mind. The advice of Ruskin is to the point: "Make it the first morning business of your life to understand some portion of the Bible clearly, and your daily business to obey it in all you do understand."

"Read thou, but first thyself prepare. To read with zeal and mark with care; And when thou read'st what here is writ, Let thy best practice second it; So twice each precept shall be, First in the Book and next in thee."

-Peter Heylyn.

Eisegetical Bible study. One of the most common and persistent abuses of the Bible is to read into it what it was never intended to teach, or to read into one part truth which is clearly taught elsewhere but not so Obviously set forth in the passage in hand. Finding the Trinity and the Church in the story of Abraham sending his servant for a wife for Isaac is an illustration of what I mean by reading truth of one part of the Bible into another part which was never meant to teach it. This I regard as distortion of Scripture, as if you should try to put the heart of a man into his hand or foot. Let each part teach what it naturally seeks to teach. Do not force the Scripture. Do not look for hidden meanings. Exegesis, not Eisegetics, should be the rule in Bible study. An old monk once truly said: "Who so seeketh an interpretation from this book shall get an answer from God; whoso bringeth an interpretation to it shall get an answer from the devil."

In the study of any portion of the Bible be on guard against the tendency to follow the system of theology which you have been taught, and to read into the passage the side of truth not in that place emphasized. Rather seek to acquaint yourself with the occasion of the utterance and learn why the fragmentary or one-sided statement was on that occasion made. And at the same time be on guard against seeing in the passage only that which substantiates your system of theology. We should seek to possess the uncommon qualities which Dr. Ballentine declares are required, viz., to abstain from presenting the view of a truth as it lies in our own mind when teaching a passage in which it is presented in but a fragmentary view. Let your theology have as many contradictions as there are contradictions in the Bible. Truth is paradoxical and many-sided. If Ezekiel had been a Calvinist when God said to him, "Can these bones live?" he would have said, "No; these bones cannot live." If he had been an Armenian he would have said, "Yes, these bones can live." But Ezekiel lived before either Arminian or Calvin, and
he replied: "I won't say, Lord; then knowest." Do not attempt to crowd all the meaning of the Scripture into the set of propositions which you will henceforth regard as all-inclusive: "The Lord hath more light to break forth from His Word." (Peter Robinson of The Pilgrim Fathers.)

"There is more available truth yet to be gleaned from the Sacred Writings that has thus far escaped the notice of many Commentators than from all other sources of human knowledge." (Daniel Webster.)

Systems of theology are very valuable if they are not allowed to control one's thinking; if a candid and thorough examination of the Scriptures is made a test of their truth; if they do not prevent the student from seeing truth just as it lies on the Holy page. Extract all the meaning from the Bible which it possesses and do not first inject meaning into it. Tregelles has called Bengel "The father of modern Biblical study." Let us never forget his famous canon of 150 years ago. "Put nothing into the Scriptures but draw everything from them, and suffer nothing to remain hidden which is really in them."

Fragmentary Avoid fragmentary Bible study. The sum of all the parts is not the whole.

Bible study. Physiological botany as contrasted with plant analysis may suggest what I mean. Dr. Macauley's message to the World's Y. P. S. C. E. Convention was: "I trust that in your Convention emphasis may be laid upon the necessity for systematic and intelligent study of Scripture as well as for the more emotional and disconnected expressions of devotion which sometimes predominate in Christian Endeavor meetings."

Too many Endeavorers do what I have heard in England called "plum picking." They go to the Bible for a nice verse to say in meeting. If this habit should result in our young people being denied a comprehensive knowledge of the Bible I should almost feel like saying that the Young People's meeting should be abolished and a Bible class organized in its place.

Does your Bible fall open at favorite chapters? If it does this you should beware. We need a variety of food to sustain physical life. Our Bible opens with an authorization to man to eat freely of the trees of the garden, and it closes with an invitation to drink freely of the Water of Life. Silkworms may thrive on mulberry leaves alone, and the butterfly on nectars only; the cow may live for months on grass or hay, but for man God has ordained that he should have a variety of food. It is said that fifty years ago a certain European government put to death criminals by limiting them to one kind of food. Bread is made of six kinds of grains—wheat, oats, barley, corn, rye, and rice. Roots with their gluten, sugar, and starch, and fruits with their juices, all are ours freely to feel upon.

"Scripture," says Dr. Boign, "is wonderfully balanced in all its parts; let us study it and be the same, that we may be well-balanced men. The study of the Prophetic Word must not supersede that of the Proverbs, nor must we search the latter merely to discover the traces of higher doctrines which may be found there. We must not overlook the homely and the little and the common. But we must stoop to the petty moralities and courtesies and niceties of tame life, not neglecting those parts of the Scripture which treat of these as rapid or obsolete, but bringing them to bear upon each step of our daily walk and delighting in them as the wisdom of God only wise.

"There is a venerated literary taste, arising not so much from reading what is bad, as from exclusive study of one class of books, and these perhaps the most exciting. There is also a venerated spiritual taste, not necessarily growing out of error or the study of unseasonal books, but arising from favoritism in the reading of Scripture, which shows itself both in the preference of certain parts to others, and in the propensity to search these others only for their references to certain favorite truths. Let the whole soul be fed by the study of the whole Bible, so that there be no inequality in the growth of its parts and powers."

Uncorrelated To study any part of the Bible out of relation to the other parts near to it or remote from it, and ignorance of the plan and purpose of the whole, is an abuse of the Bible. Several words come to mind suggestive of what is here meant. They are: Unsystematical, unmethodical, unscientific, indiscriminate, uncomprehending, unconnected, unscientific, uncorrelated.

"All that a man hath will be given for his life." Is it not in the Bible? Yes, but I do not believe this is true, therefore I reject the Bible. But, hold! Let us look at the words in their connection and see who
uttered them. Turn to Job 2: 4: “And Satan said, Skin for skin; yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life.” This is a lie to brand which all the martyrs from Abel to the missionaries in Pekin rise up before us.

“This is My body.” Of what was this said? Of a piece of bread. When was it said? Before Christ died. Who said it? Our Lord. When He did so it was while a piece of bread which He had just broken off a loaf was in His hand. What meaning did He purpose to convey to those reclining about the table? That that piece of bread was a part or the whole of His body? What would those reclining about the table understand Him to mean when He said, “This is My body”? What had our Lord and His disciples been doing just before He uttered those words? They had been eating the Passover Lamb. In the interpretation of the words “This is My body” must be taken into consideration the whole history of the Passover feast, and the fact that our Lord is called “The Lamb of God.” Did He on any other occasion speak of being eaten? What did He say then? How was He understood by some? Did He correct their impression? How was He accustomed to speak? Always literally, or sometimes in a figure?

Our Lord was a comprehensive student of the Scriptures. When one portion was quoted and misapplied He said, “Again, it is written.” Note He did not say “against,” but “again.” The Bible says, “Judge not.” In another place it says, “Judge righteous judgment.” Both are true. To understand them the setting of each must be known.

One might read the entire Bible from Genesis to Proverbs xxxi: 4, and say, “I know how to deal with gods. The Bible teaches that we should not answer a fool according to his folly lest we be like unto him.” His friend who had begun to read the Bible where he left off, and had read through to Revelation, might reply, “The Bible does not teach that. The Bible requires that we should not answer a fool according to his folly lest he be wise in his own conceit.” Both would be wrong, for the Bible contains both statements.

In the study of the Bible we should recognize it as a library, as a literature. It is in striking contrast with the Mohammedan Bible, which rightly claims to have been produced by one man. There is just as clear evidence that the Christian Bible is the result of the growth of many centuries, and of revelations of divers sorts given in divers manners to different persons. Each of the sixty-six books of the Bible is a unit in itself, with a purpose and a plan, and an unique historical situation, and in the study of each we must ask ourselves: To whom was it written? By whom? When? And for what purpose? The revelation in the Bible is progressive. God, the Father Teacher, did not make His own knowledge, but the capacity of man, the measure of His impartation of truth. This regulated also the method which God employed. Historical perspective is essential in true study of the Bible.

While the Bible is a library, it is also in a real sense a single book, for one purpose runs through all the parts. In the opening chapters we have an account of the Old Creation, and in the closing chapters a description of the New Creation, and in the intervening parts we have the way from the one to the other marked out. God's redemption of the world through Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit is the theme of the Bible, and in the light of this all its parts should be viewed.

The Bible is a Body of Truth. The whole is alive, but not all the parts are equally profitable and equally vital. Because of lack of perspective, many are spending time on remote and unessential questions. Hundreds of Bible students are trimming the anger nails and examining the soles of the feet of this body of truth. They have never rested on its bosom or heard its heart beat.

“In the volume of the book it is written of Me.” What book? What person? Let Martin Luther reply: “There is only one book—Scripture; and only one person—Jesus Christ.”

All Bible study should be Christo-centric. Standing at the center we can view the whole and the parts in their relation better than anywhere else. Some one has represented a parable by a circle, its details by the radii, and its great truth by the center. The reason for so much misinterpretation of parables is that instead of first seeking to grasp the truth to be illustrated and then permitting the details easily to adjust themselves, men begin with the particulars and make so much of them that the whole is made ridiculous. So in viewing the Bible and Christianity many fail to see harmony of parts because their point of view is wrong.

One has said in speaking of the essentials of suc-
cess: “What the world needs is not so much minute men as minute men.” Concentration in Bible study without absorption in details, and the interpretation of the whole from the proper point of view is much needed in our day.

An artist once wrote the Constitution of the United States in such a manner as to represent the face of Washington. This was discernible only at a certain angle and from a certain distance. The critic of the writing on close examination would condemn it; he would say, “This writing is most disorderly; no proper margin has been allowed. This letter H is entirely too large for the other letters of the word in which it is found; the shading of this W is entirely out of proportion.” But let the critic take the proper point of view and once see the object of the writer in thus shading his letters and placing them upon the page, and all his objections disappear. It is thus with the Bible: Its proportions and its method of putting things are subordinate to the central purpose of the whole. With Wesley we say, “At any price give me the Book of God. I sit down alone, only God is here. In his presence I open and read His book for this end, to find the way to heaven.”

An umbrella is a success for the purpose for which it is made. If one should attempt to use it to do the work of a shovel or of a broom, it would prove a failure. So with the Bible. It has not been given to teach geology or chemistry or mathematics or astronomy. It has not been given to tell how the heavens go, but to show man how to go to heaven. For this it has proved and is proving a real success.

Use of the Bible. We have been considering some abuses of the Bible, and in so doing have come almost unwittingly to speak of its use. This we might summarize as two-fold, as set forth in Paul’s second letter to Timothy, third chapter, verses 13 to 17. He there declares the Scripture to be able to make wise unto salvation through faith which is in Jesus Christ, and also to be profitable, that the man of God, the one already made wise unto salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, may be completely furnished unto every good work. (Cf. John xx. 39 and 81.) This was the use which our Lord and the Apostle Paul made of the Bible. In our own day the good is in danger of becoming the enemy of the best in Bible study. Our Lord’s method has been in certain quarters criticised, but at the end of the first century of world-wide missionary effort, with the needs of innumerable millions known and realised as never before, we are constrained to believe that the simple teaching forth of Gospel truth is quite as much required as it was in olden time.

“In these times of great religious animation, and of little religious depth, times of sedulous exactitude in scholarship and of feeble consciousness toward the unseen future and the eternal, times in which whatsoever is of boundless dimensions in Holy Scripture has passed beyond our range of vision while our spectacled eyes are on iota’s” (Sir Isaac Taylor’s “Spirit of Hebrew Poetry,” p. 43), let us set sail into the great deep of God’s World; let us return with fresh vigor to a study of the Scriptures which principally teach what man is to believe concerning God and what duty God requires of man.

“We search the world for Truth:
‘We seek the good, the pure, the beautiful
From graven stone and written scroll,
And all old flowers fields of the soul;
And weary seekers of the best
We come back laden from our quest
To find, that all the sages said
Is in the book our mothers read.’

Yea, more than all the sages said is in the book our mothers read, for not all the wise of the world have told us how to become wise unto salvation through faith which is in Jesus Christ, nor how to become completely furnished unto every good work. May the charge of our Lord against the Sadducees never be deserved by us. “Ye do err not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God.”