

AN ADDRESS

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

NEW-JERSEY BIBLE SOCIETY,

AT THEIR

ANNUAL MEETING,

IN THE CITY OF NEW BRUNSWICK, STATE OF
NEW-JERSEY,

ON TUESDAY, 27th AUGUST, 1811.

AT THE

REQUEST OF THE BOARD OF MANAGERS,

BY THE PRESIDENT OF SAID BOARD.

[Edina Quidinet]

BURLINGTON, N. J.

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1811.

ADDRESS, &c.

CHRISTIAN BRETHREN,

It is with great pleasure, that I meet you on this second Anniversary of our Institution.

Having now had the experience of its operation for two years, it may not interfere with the business of the day (in compliance with the request of your managers at their last meeting,) to reflect a few minutes on our present circumstances, *before we go to business*; and more particularly

On the object we have in view, with the encouragements to persevere;

On the means in our power, to accomplish that object: And,

On the importance of the issue.

By this we may be urged to **greater zeal** and activity in this benevolent attempt. We have already done so much, as to render despair inexcusable. Yet I am persuaded, had we been sufficiently impressed with the magnitude of the object, as a measure of strict obligation and essential importance to our country, if not to mankind at large, we should have made much greater progress at this moment.

Our address, "The New-Jersey Bible Society," explicitly shows, that disseminating the Bible, wherever it is in our power, but especially in our own state and particularly among those who are otherwise unable to obtain it, is the important object we have in view.

The reason of our conduct is obvious;—we firmly believe, that the Bible contains the clear and only *written* revelation of the will of God to man.

This leads us to estimate this book as one of the highest privileges; and the knowledge of it, as the greatest blessing we can confer on our fellow men. Hereby we may become "Workers together with Christ," to fulfil those glorious promises, that "in the latter days all shall know the Lord, from the least unto the greatest; and that the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the seas."

These all-important events have hitherto been greatly impeded, and our hopes yet hang suspended, on these promises still being in a progressive state.

The Apostles laboured hard and did much towards this desirable end. Their successors, for a few hundred years, were not negligent; but by their perseverance and industry spread the gospel generally, throughout the Roman dominions at least, and in some instances carried the joyful news of salvation to other nations. But dark clouds soon gathered round the ecclesiastical horizon. The labourers in the vineyard were almost confined to their personal exertions as preachers of the gospel. Although the good news was early committed to writing by faithful men, inspired by the Holy Ghost, manuscripts were attended with great labour and of course extravagant prices. If one could be procured for a whole congregation, it was thought an invaluable prize; and indeed but few, in comparison with the whole, could read, when a copy was obtained. When the man of sin began to prevail, and many antichrists appeared in the world;—when the incursions and depredations of the barbarous nations of the north overwhelmed the Roman empire, and Mahometan imposture and delusion took place of the gospel of Jesus Christ, in many parts of Europe and Asia, darkness, *gross darkness*, soon covered the nations of the earth. A total loss of this source of religious knowledge, seemed almost inevitable; and indeed, had not a superintending Providence brought good out of evil, by his infinite wisdom, this would have actually taken place, and we now, might have been involved in heathenish darkness and superstition. The Monks who flew to the wilderness and erected monasteries in the fastnesses of the mountains, by these means retained the sacred deposite, together with the languages in which it was written, till the day star began again to arise and enliven a darkened world. Mosheim informs us, that “the liberal arts and sciences would have been totally extinguished, had they not found a place of refuge, such as it was, among the Bishops and Monastick Orders.” To these we owe the preservation and possession of all the ancient authors sacred and profane.

“Forbidding the vulgar tongue to be used in the offices of devotion and in reading the Scriptures, though undoubtedly a great corruption in the christian church, was of infinite service to the interests of learning. When the Ecclesiasticks had locked up their religion in a foreign tongue, they would take care not to lose the key. Most of the celebrated Reformers (before and at the reformation) had been Monks or Ecclesiasticks in the the Church of Rome. Notwithstanding this,

the number of books of every kind was considerably lessened; and many were wholly lost during these dark ages. So great was this loss, that a book of any character was reckoned almost invaluable. Dr. Robertson tells us in his 'View of the progress of Society,' that Lupus Abbot of Ferriers, in a letter to the Pope, in 855, beseeches him to lend him a copy of Cicero de Oratore and Quintilian's Institutions, for, says he, 'though we have parts of these books, there is no complete copy in all France.'

The Countess of Anjou paid for a copy of the Homilies of Haiman, bishop of Halderstadt, 200 sheep, 5 quarters of wheat, equal to 40 bushels, and an equal quantity of rye and millet.*

So late as the year 1471, when Louis XI, king of France, borrowed the works of Resis, the Arabian physician, from the Faculty of Medicine in Paris, he not only deposited in pledge a considerable quantity of plate, but was obliged to procure a nobleman to join him (the king,) binding themselves under a great forfeiture to restore it. It must be acknowledged that the present generation has grown much wiser. Did the present ruler of France stand in need of such a favour from one of his subjects, he would find a more effectual way of accomplishing his wishes.

In the reign of Edward the first, of England, the wages of a labouring man were three half pence a day, and two arches of London bridge were then built for £25.—At this time a copy of the Bible cost £30, being £5 more than the cost of the bridge. It then took the wages of a labouring man more than 13 years to purchase a Bible, and that book containing the doctrines of life and immortality, absolutely necessary to his salvation; when, at the present day, a copy may be obtained for the price of half a day's labour, and yet how little, comparatively speaking, is it sought after.

Before the reformation, this precious volume was confined to a language unknown to the greatest part of the people,† and even many of those who could read it, were prohibited from so doing, as an unlawful act, this being exclusively the province of the priesthood. By an act of the Parliament of England in the 34th and 35th of Henry VIII. in the year 1542-3,

* In the year 690, king Alfred gave an estate of eight hides, or as much land as eight ploughs could labour, to Benedict Biscop, founder of the Monastery of Weremouth in Northumberland, in Great Britain, for a single volume on Cosmography. *Bed. Hist. Abbot Wermuthen*, p. 297.

† In the 8th century, in Spain, then professing christianity as a nation, they were compelled to issue canons against ordaining men Priests or Bishops, who could neither read nor sing psalms. *Du Pin, Hist. Eccles. Cent. 10.*

ch. 1st, it is thus ordained, "That the Bible shall not be read in English in any church.—No woman or artificer, apprentice, journeyman, serving man of the degree of yeoman, or under husbandman or labourers, shall read the New Testament in English."

The first translation of this invaluable book into the English language, was by Tindal, for which he paid the forfeit of his life in 1526. After his death, not terrified by so awful an example, another edition was sent out into the world, by Miles Coverdale and John Rogers, the latter of whom also expiated his supposed guilt at the stake. It has since been translated into every language in Europe, and by this time, though at an immense expense, even India and her various casts of Hindoos, are astonished to find it in the greatest part of their numerous languages.* The British and Foreign Bible Society in London, have almost performed miracles on this subject. Their aids afforded to Messrs. Carey and others in spreading these glad tidings of salvation throughout all India, after all they have done in Europe and Africa, are almost incredible. Besides this they have, in one instance, so aided an establishment at Basle in Germany, that 250,000 German Bibles may be successively furnished for the benefit of the present and future generations. In the last year, it is said, they have expended £30,000 sterling, or upwards of 130,000 dollars in this glorious service.

This recital of facts has been made to remind you of the abundant advantages we now enjoy over former generations; and of course, of the obligations we are under to improve the inestimable talent committed to our care by that overruling Providence, whose moral discipline with all the nations, is so fast hastening on, the glorious appearance of the great God, even our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and of necessity thus advancing the best interests of mankind.

Is the Bible so invaluable a gift of God,—formerly rare, dear and unintelligible to a great part of our fellow men?—Has it now by the goodness of God become pretty general

* We are informed by a late pious and learned prelate of the English church, (see Bishop Newton's works, vol. 3, p. 397—8,) that in London the societies "for promoting Christian Knowledge,"—and "for the propagation of the gospel in foreign parts," had at that time, (A. D. 1765) "distributed many hundred thousands of bibles, prayer books and religious tracts to the great advancement of religion in the world:"—that they had "printed and distributed more than 30,000 copies of the Bible in the Welsh language—had procured an edition in Arabick of above 6,000 Psalters and 10,000 Testaments;—also 5,000 Catechetical Instructions, with an abridgment of the history of the Bible annexed, for the use of the christian churches in Palestine, Arabia, and the neighbouring countries."

amongst *us*, being in our native language, which we all can read for ourselves, and by which we have been instructed, improved and made to differ from our christian brethren in times of ignorance and oppression? What do we not owe to our gracious God for his distinguishing love? What are the returns we should make for his condescending goodness? Surely the least that can be expected, is our best endeavours to enable others of our race, who sit in darkness, but who are equally with us the objects of divine mercy, to participate in this great blessing.

I also have it in view to show, how God in his great mercy is, by these means, fulfilling his gracious promises in bringing about the conversion of our fellow men, by spreading the knowledge of the gospel over the habitable globe, under the cheering hope, that the time is drawing near if not already come, when God will add his blessing to the means thus used by his servants, and grant to them universal success.

The benign influence of the christian system on the happiness of mankind, and the precious promises the gospel reveals for our encouragement, have been long manifest in the change gradually wrought in the tempers, dispositions, and policy of the nations of the earth. The information they have afforded with regard to the divine government, and the relation which God has been graciously pleased to profess to the workmanship of his hands, testifying to all the world, "that he is no respecter of persons; but in every nation he who feareth him and worketh righteousness, is accepted of him." That such is his impartiality with regard to all men, that in the final day of account, "many shall come from the east and the west; and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, but many of the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into utter darkness." The pure doctrines of the gospel give the most amiable, though awful view of the divine Being, our glorious and adorable Creator and Preserver; discover to the enlightened soul the inexpressibly malignant nature of sin, and the infinite and condescending mercy of redeeming love. They tend to wean us from the world, by declaring, it is not our abiding place, and that our passage through it will be attended with sorrow and trouble, and at the same time, they elevate our nature and exalt the redeemed soul to the privileges of angels. Wherever these doctrines prevail, none of the human race, who bear the image of the Creator, can be justly regarded as altogether worthless and vile, as Christ himself commands the

gospel to be preached to every creature under heaven. It is therefore well observed by an excellent writer, "that taught by these glorious doctrines, (however before degraded and miserable,) man becomes acquainted with the character of his being.—He finds himself destined to an immortal life.—He feels himself endued with a capacity for eternal happiness.—To this sublime end, his mind almost involuntarily endeavours to adapt itself. His imagination—his understanding—his heart assumes new energy and extent, as they are employed on so boundless a scene. And while he looks forward to those bright prospects, which religion unfolds to his view, sentiments of conscious dignity insinuate themselves into his mind, so as to purify his taste and exalt his desires above the gross and fleeting pleasures of this terrestrial state."*

Can then, those who are engaged in this benevolent work we have so successfully begun, want encouragement to persevere in the noble undertaking; *those* who profess to have received these doctrines as from God, and to have experienced their divine energy? If the great God himself has declared, "that in the latter day he will pour out his spirit on all flesh;" If our great Redeemer has, in his holy word, commanded his disciples "to preach the gospel to every creature in the world, and that he will be with them to the end;" are not *we* called upon, who profess his holy religion, (and on whom the end of the world, or of the present era, seems to be fast hastening) to be up and doing?—Watching and praying, with our lamps trimmed and burning, knowing by the signs of the times that the voice, proclaiming that the bridegroom is coming, is almost sounding in our ears? Is greater encouragement wanted? Reflect on and duly estimate the superiour advantages you enjoy. Compare your privileges with the wretched state of those who know not God, and who never have heard the glad tidings of salvation, through the atoning blood of the Redeemer; and then say, what value and importance do you set upon the difference in your favour, and by this scale, graduate the obligations you are under to every human creature, ignorant of the all-essential truths of the gospel of the Son of God; and accordingly rouse yourselves to corresponding exertions to discharge the heavy debt that remains upon you.

Compare the dangers and labours of the Apostles and the primitive christians, in propagating the gospel, which was "in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings,

* White's Sermon.

and in fastings;” and I may add, in the loss of life itself,—I say compare these with what is now required of you. You can enjoy all the comforts of domestick and civil life, and yet by the aid of a small sum of money, (comparatively speaking) and a little exertion, can send the gospel throughout your whole land, and thus make glad the city of our God. Do you say that laymen, engaged in other pursuits of life, cannot all be preachers of the gospel?—You now see that this is not a valid objection.

The regular ministers of the gospel, are too few to accomplish this arduous task alone. They are scarcely sufficient, without other aid, to keep up the knowledge and life of religion in the enlightened parts of the world, by their personal labours. But you must be convinced, by the plan we have in view, that every man, woman and child, may with ease do something in this important business, by casting in their mite to send this best of books into all the world. By the divine blessing, this may become the most effectual way of preaching the gospel to every creature under heaven, and in which alone, we may be able to fulfil our duty and acquit ourselves to our Lord and Master.—Every awakened sinner, brought to the knowledge of God in Christ Jesus, by this mean, becomes an assistant in this great work, and adds to the number of the labourers in the Lord’s vineyard. But this must not be a by business—It must not be merely the thought and exertion of a leisure hour. It must be engaged in as a duty of the first importance;—we must be zealous and diligent, or we may not be found, even labourers, at the eleventh hour. The door of success may be closed against us,—the harvest may be past, and we excluded from a share in the divine reward.

Look around you and behold the manly exertions of the friends of religion and humanity in Europe, of every character, denomination and calling; and even in India, where the greatest difficulties are surmounted and the greatest dangers are encountered without dimay, to accomplish this desirable end; nay look to your fellow citizens of these United States, and behold the noble spirit that has appeared in a majority of the states for the like purposes.

The Bible Society of Massachusetts has already distributed, Bibles, Testaments and Psalters &c. to the number of 32,554,—That of Philadelphia to the number of 5,422. Literally the fields are ripe for the harvest, and our Lord seems to be calling out his labourers to gather it in.—Let not the citizens

of New-Jersey be out done;—Let *us* not be the last to come in, with zeal and activity to the blessed work.—Christ hath said “that he who confesseth him before men, him will he confess before his father who is in heaven.”

We are urged to the greatest exertions by the noble, disinterested and unparalleled example of the “British and Foreign Bible Society” in the City of London, already mentioned; which by a union of all denominations of christians, as a victorious solid Phalanx, seems to be performing wonders beyond the attempts of latter ages, and by whose universal christian philanthropy and unbounded benevolence to all Nations, Languages and Tongues, Friends and Enemies, they have arisen nearer to the standard of purity and disinterestedness prescribed in the gospel, than ever was before known in Europe.—And it is with peculiar pleasure, and under a grateful sense of their pious attention to us, in this state, that I take this opportunity of informing you, that among the innumerable Instances of their great Catholicism and benevolence, our little society has been favoured by them, with the donation of £100 sterling to aid our endeavours and encourage our progress in this glorious work.

Does not all this unparalleled unanimity, induce a token of the divine approbation, and a strong presumption that the time of refreshing is at hand? Means must be used, if we expect success, for God hath said, that he will be inquired of, to do these things for a guilty world.—Why not then these means?—are they not probable means?—nay are they not the most likely means?—If the Bible has done so great things for us Gentiles, in these ends of the earth; why should we not expect as great things for others, from the same cause? Is the arm of the Lord shortened, or has the Gospel lost its efficacious Power, since it became the mighty power of God in your souls?—God is the same yesterday, to-day and forever. Let us then not be discouraged, but determine to press forward under such encouraging examples.

The ministers of Christ may do much.—They have done a great deal—but they must be assisted, and encouraged by the united exertions of their people. One can afford pecuniary assistance.—Another can give his personal aid in promoting subscriptions and collections and recommending the work—while the poorest and weakest among us, can pray earnestly for the blessing of great success to all.

Does an objection arise here, which unfounded as it is, has been heard?—That in our happy country, and in the present

lightened state of the world, there cannot be any necessity for these exertions, as every family has a Bible, and it is constantly read in every school.

Examine for yourselves, fellow citizens, and you will find hundreds, if not thousands, in this highly favoured land, who never saw a Bible, and more that never read one. However strange it may seem to many, it is not more than 8 or 9 years ago, that a worthy clergyman of my acquaintance, was invited to preach in a school house not 20 miles from Philadelphia, in New-Jersey. The congregation consisted of between 20 and 30 old people, the youngest being about 60 years of age. After a very pathetick sermon, and the service ended, they surrounded the minister with tears in their eyes, earnestly thanking him for his kindness, and assuring him that it was the first sermon they had ever heard in their lives. And even in the populous city of Philadelphia, a woman between 30 and 40 years old, necessarily detained at family prayers, in the morning at a clergyman's house, within a few years past, on rising from her knees, declared to him that it was the first prayer she had ever heard.

But put success at the lowest state, to wit, that after all your labour and expense, you should not be assured, that more than one solitary individual had been brought to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ: Do you think that you would repent of what you had done, at rendering your final account? Especially if you conceive of this single soul, within your hearing, chanting forth the praises of God and the Lamb, "Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power be unto Him who sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb forever and ever!"

If the eternal Son of God took our nature upon him, and spared not his own precious life, that we might live forever;—what ought we not to do to make others acquainted with this great salvation?

Can you then hesitate to engage with ardour in these comparatively small exertions, when you compare them with those endured by others to communicate these good things to you? We are assured that they were tried by cruel mockings and scourgings, by bonds and imprisonments. They were stoned—they were sawn asunder—were tempted—were slain with the sword—they wandered about in sheep skins and goat skins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented.

But it is time to examine the means in our power.

Blessed be God, no one can deny, but we have this invaluable book, at as moderate a price as it can be desired under present circumstances.—Twenty-five dollars will purchase 100 copies of the gospel of Jesus Christ—the Epistles of his Apostles, and the Revelation of St. John, in a neat handsome type and decently bound.—Money will now produce, what it cost the primitive Believers, not only labour, sorrow and trouble, but even life itself, to publish to mankind. A subscription, you all know has been already set on foot, for the purpose of increasing the members of this society—But from all the information yet received, there has not been that attention, which was expected, paid to getting it filled.—The excuses of bad weather—bad roads—other important engagements and family difficulties, have been heard—but do these discover a conviction of the importance of the institution?—God in his wise Providence, has so united the means and the end, that we have no right to expect the last without using the first.

Let us then, friends and brethren! assume fresh ardour, and endeavour with greater perseverance to accomplish this charitable work so well begun.

As many in our country may not be able to spare the stipulated subscription and stated annuity, yet would rejoice to be able to cast in their mite unnoticed, it is earnestly recommended, that an annual contribution be had in every congregation of christians in our state for this purpose. If an appropriate sermon were to be preached on the preceding sabbath, and a suitable address on the day of collection, much might be done. When the burthen is properly divided it becomes so light as not to be felt.

Where is the human being among us, who would not afford one shilling per annum, or the 8th part of a dollar, to so useful a purpose. This, if systematically paid by each inhabitant, would raise a sum sufficient to purchase 3,300 Bibles or 8,000 Testaments. Our state contains about 200,000 inhabitants; suppose 16,000 of these to contribute this small sum, the object might be obtained. By this you will be convinced what might be done by zealous endeavours in so good a cause.

I trust the ministers of the gospel will not be offended, if I earnestly press this measure upon *them*.

If we fail in this benevolent undertaking, it must be from want of exertion. Every denomination of christians applaud and approve the measure. Here is no room for party division or jealousy; let us then hope to the end.

Need I say a word more on the happy and glorious consequences that must follow on tolerable success? The souls of our fellow men are at stake, and God is calling on us to be fellow workers with him for their eternal salvation.

The Bible may be now afforded to every poor family in New-Jersey, and in a short time we might make our frontier country blossom as a rose, and aid others, as we ourselves have been aided in our necessities. A union in this important *business*, will lead the members to pray more earnestly for its success. A general diffusion of the knowledge of the Bible among the poor, will enable them to gain more benefit from the sermons they hear, and give them a taste and relish for the worship of Almighty God. They will better understand the language of the preacher, and more readily apply it to themselves. As we have parts of our country of 50 and 60 miles without a place of worship, it will enable the inhabitants to spend the sabbath in reading the word. It will ameliorate the manners, the tempers, and regulate the conduct of the people at large, leading them to greater tenderness and good will to each other. And finally, it will convince gainsayers, that christians do, at least, think themselves right, while they strictly act up to the principles they profess. And in the exercise of this gospel plan, you may rationally hope at last to receive the blessed plaudit, "Well done good and faithful servants, enter ye into the joy of your Lord!"

THE END.