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ILLUSTRATIONS OF SCRIPTURE.—No. II.

THE first chapter of Genesis contains a brief account of the creation. In the second, besides the institution of the sabbath, there is a *recapitulation* of the events before related, with the addition of several particulars not before mentioned. This remark is made for the purpose of obviating, what some have thought to be a difficulty; namely, that the work of creation is said to have been completed in six days; yet, afterwards, an account is given of the formation of woman. The difficulty however vanishes at once, if this part of the sacred narrative is regarded as recapitulatory and supplemental.

Respecting the sabbath, we shall defer the remarks that we have to offer until another occasion. And we shall not amuse our readers, with any speculations or conjectures concerning the geography of Paradise.

Our present purpose is to attempt, at least, a brief illustration of the doctrine of Scripture relative to the original state of man. And here we ask our readers to peruse Gen. I. 26—31. and the whole of the second chapter. On this passage we offer the following remarks, pursuing the order that seems to us most easy and natural.

1. Man came out of the hands of his Creator perfect and entire. By the use of these two words, we mean to say that he was formed in the maturity of his powers; of full size, and strength; with the use of speech; and in the perfect exercise of reason, and every other faculty suited to his condition. The narrative of the historian supports this remark. Only attend to the 19th and 20th verses of the second chapter. "And out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air, and brought them to Adam

Almighty. That covenant, the violation of which, "brought death into this world, and all our woe," was suited to the nature of man; illustrated the perfections of Deity; and now shows how inexcusable and enormous is the apostacy of our species.

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For the Virginia Evangelical and Literary Magazine.

### ON READING TO EXCESS.

We bookish men are frequently complaining that the spirit of reading is too low among our neighbours, and trying to prevail with them to improve their minds and hearts by the use of good books. We expatiate upon the evils of ignorance, the baseness of neglecting attainable and important information, and the exquisite pleasures as well as high benefits, which well-chosen literature affords to its votaries. All this is very proper. We sometimes gain a proselyte; who never fails to thank us for his conversion from mental torpor, to enquiries and pursuits worthy of a rational being. I hope we shall go on repeating our remonstrances and persuasions on this subject, as long as we can see that they are wanted, and as often as we have any, even the least prospect of success. Next to the gaining of a soul from the dominion of sin, it is delicious to thin the ranks of intellectual darkness and stupidity.

But let it be remembered, in the mean time, that there is an opposite extreme, into which we are liable to ramble, namely that of reading too much. This takes place, when we lose sight of the main ends of reading; such as refreshing the mind for vigorous exertion, furnishing it with materials for reflection, or enlarging its stock of knowledge with a view to beneficial practice; and sit gaping over our books, day after day and week after week, without any other aim than that of present gratification. To one who loves reading, and who has a large library at hand, the temptation to sink gradually into this state is by no means a trifle.—Whether the inveterate book-worm, or whether the voluntary clodpole be the more pitiable character; or in a moral view the more culpable, I shall not undertake to determine. My purpose is to point out, by way of warning, the principal evils which result from the habit of reading to excess. I wish my own experience were less than it is, in regard to the truth of what I have to say on this habit.

In the first place, it impairs the health of the body, by

exchanging that exercise which ought to be taken in the open air for the confinement and stagnation of a chamber. I have read indeed something of the peripatetic students and philosophers in days of yore, who pursued their meditations walking about a grove, or garden, or some such place. But we manage the matter notoriously otherwise in Virginia. Having seized the volume, we do not merely become sedentary while we read: the feet are immediately elevated to the window frame, or the arch of the fireplace, so that our lower extremities make hardly so much as a right angle with the chest. In this ensnaring and mischievous position we remain, while hour after hour passes unheeded away. This produces, by and by, diminution of appetite, debilitation of the digestive organs, growing languor of the whole frame, and a crew of tormenting nervous disorders much more easily contracted than either described or removed. I am no physician to trace the miserable process accurately; but I know that while we live in these animal bodies, we must take some care of their welfare, or they will sink into a swamp of disease, and drag us along with them. And what is a man good for, or what can he enjoy, when his health is gone? Friends have kindly admonished me to read standing up; but I shall not do it, if I can find any tolerable thing on which to sit down. No; the proper course is to fling the volume aside after a moderate session, rush out of the house, and walk, run, ride, or work a while, under the wide, blue canopy of heaven.

Next, I say that excessive reading weakens the mind; or at least prevents the advancement of its strength. The truth of this observation might be inferred from the last; for such are the connexions and dependencies of things in the human system, that the immaterial part is not likely to "discourse sweet music" while the material is much out of tune. But I intend to support the assertion on additional and still more decisive ground. If the book-worm spends too much of his time in profound and difficult studies, such as Locke's Essay, Butler's Analogy, or the Night Thoughts of Dr. Young; such intense labour, combined with the want of corporeal motion, must rapidly injure both the body and the mind. Or if, which oftener happens, he limit himself to easier reading, the mind will languish for lack of exercise. If you would improve, or even preserve the vigour either of body or mind, it must be done by appropriate action. I am not alluding here to the thousands of dull, shallow books which have more of the soporific quality than of any other: I speak of history, travels, poetry, in their brightest forms; and indeed the entire circle of what is called polite literature.

In all these things the mind of the reader is extremely passive; much more so than any reader will be apt to imagine, who has not made careful observations upon himself. We read on with ease, and are pleased with the succession of facts and images presented to our view. We go on devouring volume after volume, the main powers of the soul lying all the while dormant; until at length any such exertion as deserves the name of thinking becomes a strange and very irksome employment. If it comes in our way, such a habit of indolence has seized us that we fly with alarm from the face of labour, and return to the downy couch of sloth and inactivity. *Probatum est.*

Again; excessive reading diminishes the quantity which might be acquired of genuine and useful knowledge. Suppose a man should keep himself continually stuffed to the brim with food, what must be the consequence? The food may be good in itself; but what mortal stomach can dispose of such a load? It will bring on disease far overbalancing the low gratifications of gluttony. Very similar is the case of the gormandizer of books. He may lay in good materials; but he carries on no process of intellectual digestion. The furniture of his mind, therefore, remains all in a chaotic state of confusion, "*rudis indigestaque moles,*" and turns to no valuable account. It is in a sort of vexatious amusement to converse with a scholar of this class. He gives you half-ideas and quarter-reasonings about a great many things; but useful and accurate information about nothing. Besides, much of that kind of knowledge which is of prime interest to the conduct and comfort of life, is such as cannot be learned to any tolerable perfection from books alone. For instance, study Locke, and Read, and Samuel Johnson, upon human nature. Study them attentively. But then go and mingle with mankind; observe with your own eyes the varieties of character, and the ways in which the passions operate; you will discover a thousand important things which these mighty philosophers never told you. The truth is, one may be an adept in the best metaphysical speculations, and at the same time little better than a simpleton in the practical science of man.

Farther; I am constrained to denounce this excessive spirit of reading as a very selfish propensity; and if this be correct, it merits no slight degree of censure. What do we mean by a selfish man? Is it not one who devotes himself to his own personal gratification, of whatever kind it may be? I will by no means place the bookworm, unless the very matter of his reading be wicked and abominable, upon the same level of

degradation with the sluggard, the sensualist, the gambler, or the miser; but as to the hateful characteristic of absorption in self, his principle is certainly the same with theirs. He is indulging an extravagant luxury of his own. He pursues with an enormous and constantly growing passion, a pleasure of the most unsocial kind imaginable. It ought to be remarked too, that the very solitude of this sort of voluptuary, his abstraction from society, tends powerfully to freeze the springs of benevolence in the heart. If we would preserve and invigorate the social principles of our nature, we must mingle with our fellow men; we must witness their circumstances, hold an intercourse of thought with them, and enter into a sympathizing participation of their joys and their distresses. Such was the conduct of the Author of our religion, the most illustrious model proposed for imitation. He delighted, indeed, in the hour of sacred retirement. But he was no anchorite. He did not seek to please himself alone; nor turn his back with cold indifference upon a wandering and miserable world, to spend his days in a monastery or a cave of the mountains. No; he gave much of his time to society. His heart was formed for the most endearing friendship. He disdained not to be one of a wedding party, and to promote, by a miracle, the lovely cheerfulness of the scene. He placed himself, with the most condescending and charming familiarity, in the midst of the people, the low and the poor, as well as the rich and the great; conversing freely with all, instructing all, and blessing all with his gracious and unwearied beneficence. The grand description of his life was, "that he went about doing good."

And this leads me to the last and greatest evil of excessive reading; it interferes dreadfully with the discharge of our duties. I lay it down as a maxim, which I think no sound moralist will dispute, that as man is evidently constructed for action, so he is bound to act for the benefit of his fellow men. No mortal is permitted to "live to himself;" to spend his days without attempting, at least, to be useful to others. In whatever station of life we may be placed, and more especially if talents and leisure are given to us, divine providence opens before us some path of active service, in which we are required, may I not rather say privileged, to advance the great system of human welfare. Many there are who rebel against the injunction, and forego the privilege; and few more decidedly than the slave of reading. There are wants around him which he ought to relieve; afflictions which he is loudly called to remove or to console; noble schemes of utility in hand which he is bound to aid with his most zealous co-operation.

But he cares for none of these things. And what is he doing all this while? Perhaps studying the ancient revolutions of China; or eagerly retracing all the bloody battles which have been fought, from those of "Macedonia's madman," down to the terrible field of Waterloo; or pursuing the endless mazes of the wilderness of romantic poetry. And supposing his studies to be of a better order than these, what advantage do they produce to the world, while he is not "ready to distribute, willing to communicate?" His acquisitions, which might and ought to shed light and warmth around him, are hoarded up, a fruitless treasure, in his own bosom. He plumes himself in the elegance, the dignity, the fancied harmlessness of his favourite pursuits; while, in truth, the guilt and condemnation of the unprofitable servant, who hid his lord's money in the earth, may be gathering heavily over his head. Perhaps,—forgive the conjecture, if it be erroneous,—perhaps, at this very hour, the witchery of perpetual reading seduces one, and another, and another, among those men of large minds and extensive acquirements who ought to be furnishing communications for this Magazine, calculated to enlighten the ignorant, to reclaim the vicious, and to build up the people of God in piety and virtue. Interests of no trifling magnitude depend, in my opinion, upon the merit and success of this monthly publication. And O how willingly would I see this poor quill of mine superseded and laid at rest, by the labours of brethren and friends whom I know to be far better qualified than its master to gain and to reward the public attention!

### MELANCTHON.

NOTE.—The remarks of Melancthon are excellent. All the evils which he describes result from excessive reading. It is a great fault, and a great folly; but taking our countrymen at large, not very common. Few, except professional men, among us, have libraries that would furnish separately, a month's reading to a true *helluo librorum*. We have heard of readers of the Magazine, who scarcely get through its forty-eight pages before the time of publication returns. We wish that our excellent correspondent, whose quill must by no means be laid aside, would furnish a paper for our next No. on the evil of reading too little. We venture to suggest a cause, more efficient than that assigned by him, for the silence of those, who through our pages, might enlighten and rouse the public mind, and improve the public morals; it is the besetting sin of the nation to which we allude, *the love of having*.