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EDITORIAL

THE LATEST IMPROVED BIBLE.

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THE American Baptist Publication Society has just issued the latest “improved edition” of the Old and New Testaments.

In point of typography and general make-up, it is hardly possible to “improve” upon editions now in the market. With the Bible, more than with any other work, typographical and kindred ingenuity would seem to have exhausted itself in all imaginable directions to render a publication attractive. Whether in the matter of typography, and other features concerning books, the American Baptist Publication Society has actually, or not, made an improvement, is purely a matter of taste. The publication is undoubtedly attractive.

In what concerns intrinsic matters, opinion will surely not be seriously divided. The word-changes are trifling in import. The criticisms usually offered to Bible “improvements” are afforded hardly any ground to stand on. There is no amendment consisting either in interpretations, or in expurgation of any passage.

Nevertheless, one amendment has been made to the usual run of Bible editions that deserves comment. The amendment consists in the total omission of what may be called the syllabus of each chapter, and which most Testaments carry, in order “to aid the reader.”

This amendment is partly to be regretted, partly to be applauded.

To be regretted is the omission of the syllabus from the purely historic chapters. The omission is to be regretted because the syllabus is a positive aid to the researcher. Without the syllabus, the researcher has to read a goodly portion of each chapter before he strikes the one he is looking for.

On the contrary, to be applauded—loudly to be applauded—heartily to be applauded—is the omission of the syllabus from the chapters that are not historic. These syllabi are condensed interpretations, inserted by Bible editors, whose piety

has throttled their philology, if they ever had any, and has carried their judgment captive. With hardly an exception, the condensed interpretations are a blotch upon the literary beauty, often the sublime beauty, of the chapters that they head. This is most conspicuous, offensively conspicuous, in the condensed interpretations that head the “chapters” of the “Song of Songs.”

The “Song of Songs,” attributed to Solomon, ranks with the choicest piece of literature that the human brain has produced to gladden, to elevate and inspire the human heart. Anacreontic without being erotic, Sapphic without being prurient, robustly human without being animal, lofty without hysterics—the Song of Songs presents an unmatched succession of pictures raised by the immaculate yearnings of two lovers whose thoughts are untainted by luxury, but who, in direct touch with Nature, can say of their home—

“Our couch is green,
The beams of our house are cedars,
And our rafters are firs.”¹

Well has the Baptist improved edition done by cleansing the Prophets as well as, and above all, the Song of Songs, of the misfit and ludicrous interpretations—such as “The Church’s love unto Christ,” “The profession of the church, her faith and hope,” “The church glorieth in Christ,” “A description of Christ by his graces,” etc., etc., etc.—interpretations that mar and desecrate the text. Well for the Baptist edition to have left out all these “headlines,” and preserved the Psalms, Ecclesiastes, the Prophets, and above all, the Song of Songs in their literary purity and Oriental splendor.

Transcribed and edited by Robert Bills for the official website of the Socialist Labor Party of America.
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¹ [Song of Solomon, I:6.—R.B.]