

manifestly fly in their faces. . . . And perhaps, if it were well examined, it would be no very extravagant paradox to say, that there are fewer that bring their opinions to the sacred Scripture, to be tried by that infallible rule, than bring the sacred Scripture to their opinions, to bend it to them, to make it, as they can, a cover and guard to them. And to this purpose, *its being divided into verses, and brought, as much as may be, into loose and general aphorisms,* makes it most useful and serviceable. And in this lies the other great cause of obscurity and perplexedness which has been cast upon St. Paul's epistles from without.

After I had found, by long experience, that the reading of the text and comments in the ordinary way proved not so successful as I wished, to the end proposed, I began to suspect, that in reading a chapter as was usual, and thereupon sometimes consulting expositors upon some hard places of it, which at that time most affected me, as relating to points then under consideration in my own mind, or in debate amongst others, was not a right method to get into the true sense of these epistles. I saw plainly, after I began once to reflect on it, that if any one now should write me a letter, as long as St. Paul's to the Romans, concerning such a matter as that is, in a style as foreign, and expressions as dubious, as his seem to be, if I should divide it into fifteen or sixteen chapters, and read of them one to-day, and another to-morrow, &c., it was ten to one I should never come to a full and clear comprehension of it. The way to understand the mind of him that writ it, every one would agree, was to read the whole letter through, from one end to the other, all at once, to see what was the main subject and tendency of it: or if it had several views and purposes in it, not dependent one of another, nor in a subordination to one chief aim and end, to discover what those different matters were, and where the author concluded one, and began another; and if there were any necessity of dividing the epistle into parts, to make these the boundaries of them.

"In prosecution of this thought, I concluded if necessary, for the understanding of any one of St. Paul's epistles, to read it all through at one sitting; and to observe, as well as I could, the drift and design of his writing it. If the first reading gave me some light, the second gave me more; and so I persisted on, reading constantly the whole epistle over at once, till I came to have a good general view of the apostle's main purpose in writing the epistle, the chief branches of his discourse wherein he prosecuted it, the arguments he used, and the disposition of the whole.

"This, I confess, is not to be obtained by one or two hasty readings; it must be repeated again and again, with a close attention to the tenor of the discourse, and a perfect neglect of the divisions into chapters and verses. On the contrary, the safest way is to suppose that the epistle has but one business and one aim, until by a frequent perusal of it, you are forced to see there are distinct independent matters in it, which will forwardly enough show themselves. . . .

But this muttering of lazy or ill-disposed readers hindered me not from persisting in the course I had begun; I continued to read the same epistle over and over, and over again, until I came to discover, as it appeared to me, what was the drift and aim of it, and by what steps and arguments St. Paul prosecuted his purpose. I remembered that St. Paul was miraculously called to the ministry of the Gospel, and declared to be a chosen vessel; that he had the whole doctrine of the Gospel from God, by immediate revelation; and was appointed to be the apostle of the Gentiles, for the propagating of it in the heathen world. This was enough to persuade me, that he was not a man of loose and shattered parts, incapable to argue, and unfit to convince those he had to deal with. God knows how to choose fit instruments for the business he employs them in. . . .

All this, and a great deal more, necessary to guide us into the true meaning of the epistles, is to be had only from the epistles themselves, and to be gathered from thence with *stubborn attention*, and more than common application." p. 16.

With such indisputable illustrations of the poetry of the New Tes-