

is the same cause for his seeing the truths of the Bible through a coloured medium, as for other men; his understanding is naturally as dark, and his heart as corrupt, as that of the divines and commentators whose interpretations he rejects. One great use of consulting commentators is this, that all minds are liable to error, but not equally to the same error. Thus, the ray of truth is refracted through the dusky medium of the mind of man; but different minds have different refractive powers: we can so adjust them as to countervail the defects of our own peculiar vision, and behold correctly the distant objects which revelation discovers, and form a correct outline of the remote, though rapidly approaching realities of eternity.

To unite with all good men, we must join with them in heart as well as understanding; and for this we need the Spirit of life and love to be poured out abundantly upon us. None are so richly furnished with Christian gifts and graces as to be able to stand alone, and unconnected with others, without much loss both to their usefulness, and to their advancement in the spiritual life. The Holy Spirit does not merely impart his gifts to the children of men; he divides them severally to whom he will; and it is only by the united exercise of these divided gifts, that all the mighty advantages to be derived from them can be reaped. It is a harvest which must be collected for the public benefit, before it can be individually appropriated. Without the teaching of the Spirit, not only will Christian gifts languish, because cultivated in the case of each individual only by himself, and for himself, but the clearest understanding, even when put in possession of the truth, will retain but a cold and moonlight view of it. Distinct it may be in its dark outlines, but not represented in all its diversity and life, unless the Divine Teacher, who first discovered it to the mind, keep up its fading impression on the soul, by continually renewing it; and, brooding over the ruins of our nature, as over the chaos of a former world, bring back all into order, and separate the light of truth from that darkness, which, in the mind of man, is so continually mingling with it.—*J. Douglas, Esq.*

Biblical Literature.

OBJECT OF HERMENEUTICS, AND MODE OF ATTAINING IT.*

We shall now subjoin some observations on the method by which we may, with the most facility and success, not only comprehend the principles of hermeneutics, but also apply them with a degree of readiness. These observations may be reduced to a small compass. For, on the one hand, in this subject all depends simply on the correct determination of the object proposed by any one in the study of hermeneutics, from which the observations then flow of themselves; and, on the other, after what has already been stated, it can hardly be further necessary, to recommend it on any particular grounds.

Now, with respect to that object, it may certainly be presumed, that the principal aim of every one who applies himself to the study of hermeneutics must be this: to place himself, by means of this knowledge, in such a situation, as will enable him, by the aid of correct principles, to explain the Bible for himself, and with his own eyes to discover its contents; and further, to apply his knowledge as a test of the interpretations of others, thereby forming a judgment respecting the results to which they have arrived. We may safely suppose, that every man, who is clearly conscious of any design on this subject, will have this two-fold view; at least, it is easy to show, that one of these objects cannot be possessed without the other, and that either this design, or none that is reasonable, must be contemplated.

For one, who contents himself with merely hearing an exposition of what the Bible contains, it is not of very great importance, at least in a principal respect, what the interpretation is. Whether he

rely upon an old commentator, or a modern interpreter, in all cases, he is only led by the guidance of another. And, so long as he cannot himself determine whether the way in which he is conducted is the right one, his confidence is nothing but a blind faith, which must induce him to follow indifferently the good or the bad guide, to receive as true the most erroneous interpretations, as well as the most correct. For this purpose, it is plain that no particular study is requisite. If a man is willing to content himself with this, he may spare himself the labour of interpretation altogether. Hence, then, it is most clearly evident, that a very different design from this must be proposed, and this can be none other than one already stated. In pursuing the study of hermeneutics, the only design which can, with any appearance of reason, be aimed at, is, to learn how to interpret for one's self, and to form a judgment, on sure fundamental principles, respecting the conclusions, which the interpretation of others has deduced from the Bible. In reference to this design, and only to this, must the method also be determined, by which we should be guided in the subject under consideration.

If this point be admitted, the necessity of the following conditions, and the propriety of the directions resulting from them, for the study of interpretation, will strike every one of themselves.

The first condition is this: no one should venture to begin interpreting for himself, or even to suppose that he has acquired the ability necessary for such a task, before he has collected sufficient philological knowledge of the languages of our sacred writers, from the sources before adduced, and in the method already laid down. It has been shown in this work, that philological acquaintance with language is the first and most necessary aid and instrument in interpreting; and, as it is a self evident truth, that no man can explain a book while he is unacquainted with the language in which it was written, this at any rate need not be further developed, although it may be the more necessary to take some notice here of the very absurd method which is too often pursued in studies of this nature.

The usual manner in our universities is, to begin with hearing exegetical lectures, before the student has acquired grammatical knowledge enough to enable him to understand even the words of the original text; and, in fact, not a few, who are earnest in pursuing a thorough course of study, begin in this way for the very purpose of learning biblical philology, and of becoming acquainted with the language of scripture.

A part of this object they may also, in some degree, secure in this way. In interpreting before a class, every professor must of course point out the significations of the words, the characteristics of his author's language, the peculiarities of his style and grammar. All of this a student may apprehend, observe, and at all events note down; and thus he may collect a considerable number of fragments of biblical philology of no little use. But, in most cases of this kind, what can a man do with such fragments? Not to urge that they are nothing but fragments,—that for the most part they suppose an acquaintance with the first and most necessary grammatical principles of the language to have been already made,—that no teacher, in an exegetical collegiate course, can enter into these,—that what he draws from higher philology can be of no use to those who are not conversant in the elements of grammar;—to set aside all this, who can expect immediately to seize upon these scattered philological notices, as they must be given in the lecture of an instructor, in reference to their sources, their reasons, and objects, so as to be able to apply them himself with safety? If a man cannot do this, or does not desire to do it, he does, in fact, what is equivalent to a formal renunciation of any purpose of interpreting for himself.

It is therefore absolutely necessary, to bring to the study of hermeneutics a knowledge of the first principles, at least, of the grammar of the sacred languages. For this study can teach us nothing more than how to ascertain the sense of scripture by the assistance of that knowledge of its languages. It can only show us, how we must apply philology to interpretation, in order to be certain whether the interpretation is correct. It is, therefore, in the very nature of things, indispensably necessary, to

have previously acquired that knowledge. Secondly, the next thing, then, to be done undoubtedly is, or should be, to become acquainted with the principles of hermeneutics, with those general rules which sound understanding prescribes, and those means of assistance and invention which logic must supply. In fact, the knowledge of these is now indispensable; but this knowledge may be procured in more ways than one, and it is by no means a matter of indifference which of them shall be selected.

These principles and rules can be readily enough found in the best directions for hermeneutics which are most accessible. Neither are these principles so numerous as to require any great trouble to extract them from these directions, or any great effort to retain them in memory; much less are they so abstract, as to demand particular acuteness or deep thought, in order to penetrate into the grounds of them, and thus become convinced of their truth. If we proceed on this direct course, we certainly arrive quickly and easily enough at an acquaintance with them; but still considerable advantages appear to be possessed by another, which, although it does not so promptly lead to the same result, accomplishes the object with equal certainty.

We may ourselves draw these rules and principles of hermeneutics even from examples wherein they are applied, and thereby secure the advantage of making ourselves acquainted at the same time with the principles themselves, and with the manner, with the benefits, with the talent of applying them; and thus we shall the sooner acquire a readiness in this matter. Yet it is probable that both of these methods may be connected without inconvenience, and this would undoubtedly be the most useful course. At all events, there would certainly be no loss of time, if a student, preparatory to his first exegetical course, should apply himself for some days to the *Interpres* of Ernesti, in order to obtain from it the rules which should guide him in interpreting. A few days only would be quite sufficient for this purpose. Let him then be shown by an instructor—not how these rules can be applied—but their actual application in interpreting, and by the interpretation of the scriptures let them as it were be brought before him: in other words, let him attend to a course of instruction according to these rules, and thus learn the art of applying them from the procedure of his interpreter.

That he ought not in this stage to venture himself to make the application, and immediately to exercise himself in interpreting, is too plain to need proof: for in the first effort it will certainly be found that this requires some experience, which can only be gradually obtained by attentive observation of the endeavours of others. But this observation is undoubtedly made with the most effect, by attending a course of interpretation, and listening to the oral instruction of a teacher. It may indeed be drawn also from any commentary on the Bible, or on some separate book. We need only ask ourselves, in regard to any interpreted passage, why the commentator has explained it in this way and not in another—and we shall not only, in general, easily ascertain the rule by which he was governed, but also be in a situation to perceive the particular manner in which he applied it. But in the oral lecture of an instructor, we see as it were this very application; we can observe the proper rise of the interpretation, the gradual growth and formation of the true sense of a passage interpreted according to these rules; we perceive, with clearer apprehension, how the whole business can be conducted, how much foresight may be directed to it, where it may be abbreviated or lightened; we learn also, along with these, many practical advantages, and in this way we certainly shall approach nearer to the object in view in a short space of time, than we could possibly do in a longer period, spent in pursuing a course of study entirely private.

The benefit of exegetical lectures is, in this view of the subject, strictly and unequivocally determined; but, even in this view, it is not also very evident how, and for what purpose, they can and ought to be used.

In such collegiate courses, it should not be the principal point, merely to learn what the instructor explains from the Bible, but to notice how he explains it. In other words, we should not regard it as the great

object of attention, simply to hear another expound what the Bible contains, but rather this: to ascertain how we may be able ourselves to discover its contents. We must therefore pay more attention to the teacher's method of interpretation than to his interpretation itself, more to the manner than to the results of his exegesis, more to the reasons from which he shows the true sense of a passage of scripture, than to that sense itself which he shows as the true one.

The ground of this may be seen in that design which a man should have in the study of hermeneutics, and which alone can properly be called reasonable. But, in order to attain this object, it is not necessary to attend lectures on the whole Bible and all its separate books; it can very well be attained by hearing a course of instruction on some. It may indeed, notwithstanding this, be requisite to attend particular expositions of some books of the Old Testament and of some of the New; and in peculiar circumstances, and with certain objects in view, it may also be very useful, if opportunity offer, to hear more than one interpreter on the same book. The tyro in hermeneutics during this period, or in this term of his course, can derive little or no advantage from what are called *Cursoria*, or brief outlines. Undoubtedly they may be useful in a variety of respects, and the more certainly if the whole Bible is gone through with them; but their utility is confined to those who are prepared for them by other means, and who have approached the close of the third term, which they have to pass through.

After the student has acquired, in the proposed way, some clear ideas respecting the practical application of the principles of hermeneutics, then, in the third and last place, it is time for him to begin to exercise himself interpreting; for which no particular directions are now necessary. In order the sooner to acquire a readiness and a confidence in this matter, it is perhaps of chief importance, to undertake it at first rather slowly, to adopt nothing without being able to give one's self an accurate account of the reasons which have led to its adoption, and not to advance a step without a clear consciousness of the causes which make it necessary. In order to acquire this habit the more readily, it would be very proper, to select designedly, for the first efforts in interpretation, some passages of scripture, the exposition of which involves several difficulties. If we exercise ourselves at first with very easy passages, we may very soon be led into the error of supposing the business of hermeneutics much lighter than it is, or to congratulate ourselves on having acquired a greater ability in conducting it than is really the fact. On the other hand, we can in no event lose any thing, if we originally venture on difficult places: for if in the attempt we find them too difficult for our abilities, we thereby experience, with the utmost certainty, what deficiencies in our knowledge still remain to be supplied; and if we succeed in the effort, we may be certain of a favourable result in reference to all easy places. The correctness of these attempts of our own will be best put to the proof, by comparing the interpretations thus deduced, with others which can easily be found in the abundance of commentaries extant.

That, by pursuing this method, a man does and must learn to become his own interpreter, is not only a matter of experience, but is also to be presumed. Still, however—and this consideration affords the most suitable conclusion to the whole subject—it is certainly most evident, that no one can ever learn to interpret for himself, unless he has acquired the necessary knowledge of all the literature already introduced as belonging to exegetical theology.—*Dr. G. J. Planck; translated from the German by Dr. S. H. Turner.*

Biography.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTICES OF THE REV. BARTHOLOMEW WESLEY, AND OF THE REV. JOHN WESLEY, HIS SON; GREAT-GRANDFATHER, AND GRANDFATHER, OF THE LATE REV. JOHN AND CHARLES WESLEY: BY THE REV. W. REAL.

In the most trying period of most perilous times, from 1640 to 1660, Bartholomew Wesley was called, as a Christian King,

* Although a large proportion of the contents of this chapter is particularly appropriate to the theological student who pursues a course of divinity in German universities yet the general sentiments which it expresses, and the exposure of incorrect views and incorrect preparations which it makes are equally applicable to our own age and country. The reader will very early accommodate the author's remarks to the state of theological study among ourselves, so as to advance his own improvement.—77.