

In these circumstances, it might be considered the wisest course that could be adopted, to abandon all idea of originality, and be contented with collecting the interpretations of the ancient fathers, on which the church had impressed the stamp of orthodoxy; and then it could not be long, until circumstances became such, as to make this abandonment absolutely necessary, because all ability and all helps for original interpretation were lost.

In the ninth century all knowledge of history and languages had almost entirely vanished. The barbarous Vulgate gradually became elevated to the importance of the only text, and the glossa ordinaria to the character of the only commentary on the Bible, which was used and allowed to be used in the church; because these were the only text and commentary that could be used. And even in the use of the Vulgate, not only was no offence taken at the prodigious multitude of the grossest errors, which had crept into it, but it was appealed to in argument and interpretation, with as much confidence, as could ever have been placed in the original text itself.

Neither did the scholastic age, which immediately followed this, introduce a more favourable change for hermeneutics; on the contrary, it is rather to be said, that its fate became thereby the more unfortunate. The scholastics, indeed, were a class of men, who at first gave themselves but little trouble on this point, for to them it was not a matter of much consequence, whether they could prove their opinions from scripture or not, since they were persuaded that the truth of them could be demonstrated from the principles of their philosophy. However, towards the end of the twelfth century, some extraneous circumstances led them to pay more attention to the scriptures than they had formerly done, and consequently they were obliged to go farther into the subject of interpretation.

Hence there arose successively many sects, who wished to draw the Bible from that total oblivion into which it had sunk, and who were willing to find things in it quite different from what had hitherto been usually dictated to the people, and what they had been accustomed to hear. Beside these, since the time of saint Bernard, an important party had been formed in opposition to the new scholastic divines, which, although soon oppressed by them, were not completely put down, but continued to maintain an influence principally in the monasteries, and on many occasions withstood them with great earnestness, which produced a correspondent impression. These denominated themselves the party of the biblical divines. They assumed a degree of importance, as if they were the more tenacious of adhering to the scriptures, in proportion as the others seemed to disregard them. They were the principal agents in bringing back again the mystical method of interpretation, in order to make themselves conspicuous in some way, and by these means they frequently acquired a consideration, which threatened to be dangerous to the scholastics. These theologians, therefore, were themselves reduced to the necessity of coming down to interpretation, which, at the same time, was subjected to the most lamentable treatment it had ever experienced.

Equally incompetent to discover as to apply the simple and natural principles of an intelligent hermeneutics, they returned to the allegorizing system, which they pursued with far more extravagance than it had ever been pursued by the Jews. Whatever the wildest imagination of the most unnatural force could press out of a word of Scripture, was given as the genuine meaning, without the least regard to connection, design, character of the writer, and coherence of his ideas; and for the most part adopted the more willingly in proportion as it was senseless and irrational. But in truth they could not easily produce any other result, whenever they attempted to expound for themselves; since they had no knowledge of languages, no apprehension of a historical sense of scripture, and not the most distant idea of a spirit peculiar to the age in which the scriptures originated. Still, in fact, this injurious treatment did not affect the Scripture itself, but only the Vulgate; for it was only in this version that they were able to apply the efforts of interpretation, and therefore, the mischief was not so particularly great.

(To be concluded in our next.)

Biography.

MEMOIR OF THE LATE MRS. AGNES BULMER, OF LONDON: BY MRS. ROWLEY. From the Wesleyan Methodist Magazine. (Concluded.)

Her life had glided on, with almost uninterrupted felicity, until the middle of the year 1822. She was loved and honoured by all who had the pleasure of her acquaintance; and, what is rarer still, was admired without exciting envy. But the horizon, till now clear, began to gather blackness. The cloud grew heavier, and drew nearer. Her excellent and beloved husband was attacked by a violent spasmodic complaint, which so loosened "the silver cord," that, after a protracted illness, he passed from this world "of shadows," to the regions of uncreated light and endless felicity. Mrs. Bulmer felt this heavy stroke as a wife, and sustained it as a Christian. She knew, that with respect to him for whom she mourned, and who was for awhile "hidden from her sight," there was that hope which "blooms with immortality." In the evening prayer of her excellent husband was the sure trust expressed in Him "whose right hand had gotten him the victory;" and she felt too, that the peace which the world know not of kept her spirit in the calmness of repose upon the sustaining power of Jehovah. Upon this mournful occasion she received a letter, full of consolation, from her friend Dr. Clarke, including an invitation to pass some time at Milbrook. This invitation was not accepted at that time, though I had the satisfaction of enjoying her society there at a subsequent period.

It is in the admirable economy of divine goodness, that there is no wound of sorrow which time does not assist to heal. Mrs. Bulmer felt the truth of this; and having pleaded, and laid hold upon, that gracious assurance, "Thy Maker is thy husband," she attached herself still more closely to his service; and, as she beautifully expressed herself in a letter to Dr. Clarke, she had "recounted the mercies of God during the first year of her bereavement; and she thanked God, and took courage." Upon the decease of Mr. Bulmer she took up her residence with her aged and widowed mother. Two years only was this beloved and revered parent spared longer to her, and then sped to "join her friends above." She felt this separation as an affectionate daughter, who was alive to the tenderest sympathies and the dearest ties of nature, would do; and thus expresses herself to a relation on the occasion: "Affliction, with its intents and consolations, is a subject which the events of the last few years have frequently presented to my mind; and I can say, with David, 'It has been good for me.'" Again do we find her valued friend Dr. Clarke, with the spirit of genuine sympathy which so eminently distinguished him, endeavouring to console her under the anguish of this added bereavement.—He says,—

"Dear Mrs. Bulmer,—I hurried from Eastcot, hoping to be favoured with a last sight of your blessed mother; but found, on calling at your door, that she had gone to heaven the day before. I felt pained and disappointed on my own account; and yet, on a moment's reflection, I saw that my gratification would have added one day more to her suffering, and taken one from her glory. Such things are strictly true; but O, how hard it is for friendship and affection to feel and submit to their force! Your mother, and a goodly number of her own family, are before the throne, eternally safe from the possibility of feeling or fearing evil. The prayers of those who are gone before are registered in heaven for those who are left behind. Several are on their way, and I trust all the others are about to set off! May God bless you all, and be with you to the last moment of the journey of life, that you may be with him in all the duration of life eternal!"

The foregoing facts bring down Mrs. Bulmer's life to the year 1825. I cannot ascertain the precise time at which she was made a Class-leader in the Wesleyan Connexion; but she must, at this period, have sustained the office upwards of twenty years. How efficiently and diligently she acquitted herself in the highly responsible and multitudinous duties which it involved, the records of eternity will show; but the uniform testimony of all who were under her care goes to prove her intense anxiety for their best interests; her watchful care

over their conduct; and her joy in their spiritual prosperity. To the young she was emphatically a mother in Israel, and to the sick and poor, a kind and sympathizing friend. She thus endeared herself to all with whom she had any intercourse, her exemplary deportment in every relation of life served to "adorn the doctrine of God her saviour," and it would not be hazarding too much to say, her whole life was purely exemplary. By this mode of expression, I mean, that, in every situation in which she was placed, all she said and did might be listened to with profit, and copied with advantage. More than this need not be said, and less ought not, in fairness to her uniform and high excellence.

It will probably be expected, that, even in so imperfect a sketch as this is, a few remarks should be made upon that part of Mrs. Bulmer's life in which she appeared in the character of an author. Her "Moses's Kingdom," upon which she spent much labour and time, has been long before the public, has been highly spoken of in some of the leading periodicals, and has its just and sweet need of praise from the pen of James Montgomery, the Moses' own favourite, and a Christian man, concerning whom it may appropriately be said, "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile."

I shall make no apology for the introduction of the following fact, for which I am indebted to the kindness of our mutual friend, Mrs. James Wood, of Manchester.—

"When the foundation-stones of the Oxford-road and Ancoats-street chapels, in Manchester, were to be laid, Mr. Wood requested Mrs. Bulmer to write a hymn for the occasion; but as she was just entering upon a journey to Preston, no other opportunity presented itself than that which was afforded in the coach, where she composed those beautiful stanzas, which are now in the Supplement to the Wesleyan Hymn-book, beginning,—

"Thou who hast in Zion laid
The true foundation-stone."

They were conveyed to Manchester the next day, and sung upon the ground of those two chapels." To those who know that one of the essential attributes of a genuine poet is just this felicity of composition, the anecdote will speak for itself.

"The Memorials of Mrs. Mortimer" was the next composition through which Mrs. Bulmer made herself known to the religious world. It will appear to all who have read that excellent work, that she was fully competent to its efficient performance, and if I were desirous of impressing one who was a stranger to her with the most correct idea of her intellectual powers, I would recommend a perusal of the Preface, and the concluding pages, of that Memoir. The sound philosophy, the lucid argument, and the cool and discriminating judgment, displayed in the prefatory part of the volume, speak highly for the mental power of the writer; and the concluding observations, in the summarizing up of Mrs. Mortimer's character, do honour alike to the head and heart of our admirable friend. They afford the most indubitable evidence of the pure and elevated nature of her own religious experience, of the holy communings which her spirit held with the true Jehovah; and of the power of vital godliness, to consecrate her high attainments to the most ennobling service in which they could have been employed.

It will appear from the above sketch, that the intellectual powers of our deceased friend were of no common order. There was a vigour, an originality, and a comprehensiveness in her mind, united with a large share of firmness, prudence, and amability, which secured to her an unusual portion of influence among her friends. Her natural disposition inclined to seriousness, and there was a vein of philosophy, the contemplation transfused through her mind, which led it to associate itself rather with the sublime, than with the merely beautiful in nature, and which gave vigour to her thoughts, and great power in the expression of them, an evidence of which may be obtained by reference to her "Moses's Kingdom;" a poem which, though it be of too lofty and sublime a character to meet the taste of superficial readers, will be valued by the few who happily possess an identity of feeling with its gifted writer.

In her social and domestic character, as exhibited among her numerous friends during the whole of her religious life, Mrs. Bulmer, it is kindly commended, and

of Christianity. The principles laid down in Scripture were habitually referred to by her, and carried out in the various relations in which she stood to those around her. To her relatives she was strongly attached, and her venerable parent received, to the latest period of her life, from Mrs. Bulmer the most devoted and affectionate attentions. It has been already hinted, that, as a wife, her wisdom and influence were so exercised as to contribute in every respect to the honour and comfort of her husband. Those who were the most intimately acquainted with them both, have reason to believe, that his spiritual interests were by her constantly promoted; and that, during a very protracted illness, her affectionate counsels and fervent prayers were chiefly instrumental to the greatly-improved state of his religious experience. Earnestly alive to the spiritual dangers and interests of her relatives, she improved every opportunity for the promotion of their benefit. In her ordinary intercourse with them, but especially in seasons of affliction, truth was brought home to the understanding and conscience with irresistible clearness. Her qualifications to give advice were felt; and she exercised a delicacy and propriety in the administration of it, which generally prevented offence.

In the redemption and diligent improvement of time, our dear friend deserves to be regarded as an example. Reference has been made to her taste for literary pursuits and the enjoyment they afforded; and having but a small share of domestic cares and duties, reading and composition occupied a large portion of her time. But, though ardently devoted to them, she ever restrained them within proper bounds. Reading the Scriptures, private devotion, constant attendance upon the public means of grace, and the most conscientious attention to her duties as a Class-leader and visitor of the sick, were evident to all who knew her; and her example here might be copied with great advantage by females moving in a similar rank of life. Naturally retiring and timid, Mrs. Bulmer had great difficulties to overcome in the performance of those duties which brought her at all into contact with other persons; yet for many years she employed herself in various departments of public usefulness; and every one among her female acquaintance must acknowledge the worth of her services, and the admirable spirit in which they were rendered.

The discernment and sense of propriety, the innate delicacy, the constant discountenance of all that was trifling and vain, and the dignified manner, combined with great sweetness of spirit, gave to the advice and cautions of our excellent friend an authority which was decisive. Whether engaged in encouraging the charity of her young friends, by inducing them to join in plans of benevolent labour for clothing the poor and the aged, or in her domestic visits to those whom in trouble she could console, or in conducting the weekly exercises of her class-meeting, her sense and her piety were equally manifest. In every part, therefore, of her intercourse with others, it might have been truly said of her, "She opened her mouth with wisdom, and in her tongue was the law of kindness."

Allusion has already been made to the advantageous ground upon which our late friend stood, in reference to conversational talent, whether the company were general or select. A principal deficiency with many pious persons in social intercourse is, their want of appropriate information, and readiness to improve existing circumstances, and to direct conversation into the most edifying and instructive channel. On this subject, I pause for a single moment, for the benefit of respectable females just rising into usefulness in the church and in the world, to assure them that this defect, so lamentably general, arises not so much from want of intellectual ability, as from the neglect of suitable reading and inquiry, by which an aptitude would be gained to employ talent to its full measure of advantage.

Mrs. Bulmer's reading was ever supplying her with resources; and her habit of turning all she knew to profitable use prepared her not only to take a leading part in conversation, but to give it that tone and well-directed character, which insured unwearied interest and attention; and thus it was, that, though really diffident and unafectingly retiring, few could be met with whose company and conversation were so calculated to instruct and improve.