

When, therefore, a reader meets in a work with ideas which he knows were in circulation among those for whom the work was intended, and were circulated in a certain definite form; when he finds there not only particular words and phrases, but entire representations and series of representations characteristic of the age in which the work originated; he may confidently presume, that the writer whom he would explain connected therewith the same sense which they must first present to his readers, even if grammatical exposition could discover in his expressions another sense. Otherwise, he must undoubtedly have been misunderstood, had he in this way expressed thoughts different from those which his contemporaries would thus have communicated; and certainly no rational writer will expose himself to unavoidable misconception.

We know, for example, what idea the Jews in the time of Christ associated with the phrase, "kingdom of heaven." If then we are to take this phrase in its grammatical and verbal meaning, we should most assuredly explain it *incorrectly*; for we may with the strictest propriety, indeed, we must assume it as indisputable, that Christ and his apostles employed it in the same way as their nation,\* for this plain reason, that their nation would not have understood them, if by this expression they had intended to convey to them a different idea.

Yet, there are several cases where we are compelled to determine the sense of certain places of the Bible, solely from some local and temporary opinions, circumstances, or prejudices of the men for whom they were originally written; or are compelled, first to examine carefully what ideas these men could attach thereto; since, by an interpretation merely grammatical, without regard to those historical circumstances, no sense can be discovered, or else one which, on other grounds, is plainly perceived to be erroneous. There are in the Gospels themselves several allusions to national Jewish opinions, or to particular sectarian views, especially those maintained by the Pharisees,—to traditions and sayings of former times, preserved among the people,—to particular historical facts, which at the time particularly engaged the attention of the people,—and even to proverbs that were probably in most frequent use.

In the epistles of St. Paul, several places may be found, where he argues as if were *kai' anthropon*, from Jewish and Gentile ideas; and again there are others where he draws conclusions entirely according to the particular modes of reasoning pursued by those with whom he had to do.

If, then, we are wholly unacquainted with these points, we shall find in most of these places either no sense, or what they contain will be unintelligible to us, or we shall elicit representations which are so plainly at variance with each other, with the connection, with the views and sentiments of the writer, as known to us from other sources, that we must immediately perceive them to be *incorrect*.

In such cases, it is a real pressure of necessity, which imposes on us the law, to have regard in our interpretation to the mode of thinking of the first readers, and to what they could and must have understood. Even in the fact that such cases do exist, lies the strongest proof that this must always be done naturally and without any violence; and hence will it at the same time be most sensibly felt, how indispensable an acquaintance with the spirit and with the history of the age in which our sacred writings arose, an acquaintance with the mode of thinking of the men, and indeed, in some respects, an acquaintance with the personal circumstances of the men for whom they were originally composed, must be, for a correct interpretation, and one in which we may repose implicit confidence.

But here, who does not again see what endless variety of interpretations must arise merely from variety in the nature and compass of the historical knowledge, which the interpreter's resources enable him to apply to exposition? If sound understanding tells every man, that in interpreting he must

place himself within the sphere of the ideas and views of the original readers,—it, moreover, all had the intention to do this,—and indeed, if all had actually done so, it could not readily have happened, that all should have done so in an equal degree. One interpreter, whose acquaintance with those ideas was intimate, must find them in many more places than another whose knowledge of them was only of a general nature. And there have been many interpreters who knew nothing at all of the local and temporary meaning of certain phrases and expressions in the Bible; to whom, in fact, it never once occurred, that the early Jews could have attached other ideas to certain forms of speech than those which the literal sense of the terms expressed, and who consequently found nothing further therein but what was drawn out by this sense.

III. But, along with this general rule of hermeneutics, a third must necessarily be connected, by which the application and the applicability of the second receive some qualifications, without which indeed it ought to be immediately rejected. The rule is this, in interpreting a writing, constant reference should be had to the character, views, and known principles of the writer, from whom it originates.

The palpable reason on which this rule is founded, is likewise very easy to be perceived by a mind of plain, good sense. The character of a writer is, in reality, nothing else than a combination of all that must mark out and modify his particular way of thinking, of treating subjects, and of expressing himself. To explain the opinions and views of a writer from his character, is therefore in fact nothing else than always to go upon the supposition, that he has formed such conceptions, according to the entire situation, and all the circumstances in which he was placed, according to his own particular education, according to his personal relations, he could and must form most naturally; and who will not always do this of his own accord?

It is also equally unnecessary to show, why particular respect must likewise be paid to his design, and to his principles, as otherwise understood. This indeed is nothing else than to suppose, that a man of understanding will not readily act in opposition to his own design—will not, in general, easily contradict himself—will not without some evident cause alter his opinions: and who feels not of himself the reasonableness and even the irresistible force of this demand?

Very readily, too, may it be anticipated, that the application of these rules in interpreting the Bible in particular, must often be necessary, and that very much must depend upon it. Hence also it is, that no interpreter has ventured to abandon them; only the application of them must be of the most varied kind, and of course the expositions resulting, must unavoidably be equally varied. One interpreter may have formed a different view of the character of a sacred writer from another, or may have ascribed to him a different design; and thus he would find in him ideas altogether different from those which would be perceived by the other, although both had been governed by the same principles.

Nothing can possibly prevent this, but as extensive and accurate historical acquaintance as can be formed with all the personal circumstances of a writer, and with all the local and temporary circumstances connected with his writing, united with a nice perception of the nature and operations of the soul: which, unhappily, is not easily communicated, and is only to be comprehended by one who has a susceptibility of such impressions.—*Dr. G. J. Planck; translated from the German by Dr. S. H. Turner.*

Biography.

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

"Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain; but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised." So spake one, to whom God had said, "Lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart."

Mrs. Bulmer was the third daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Edward Collinson, of London; and was born the 31st of August, 1775. To those who were favoured with the personal acquaintance of her valuable parents, it will appear but a plain matter of fact, that

they felt themselves bound by the strongest obligations to bring up their children in the fear of God. Nor were their pious labours unrewarded. It appears that their daughter Agnes was early impressed by the "Spirit of truth," with the value and importance of religion. Being naturally sober and reflective, there is no doubt that the godly counsel which she received sank deeply into her mind, imbued her thoughtful spirit with its own energy, and laid the foundation of that beautiful structure of vital godliness which adorned the whole of her subsequent life.

At the early age of twelve years, it is recorded, that Dr. Young's "Night Thoughts" formed her favourite study, a book which is not greatly to the taste, generally speaking, of so youthful a reader. The deep interest with which she read it, is an indication of once of the philosophic tendency of her mind, and of the elevated character of her intellect.

Upon leaving school, in her fourteenth year, the force and dignity of her character became apparent in her serious and thoughtful deportment. She set herself, with assiduity and diligence, to the improvement of her mind, following out the elementary principles of school-education; yet, not with that all-absorbing energy which led to the neglect of still higher duties, and more sacred interests. Her Bible became her constant companion; and from its inspired records she was daily learning lessons of humility and wisdom: lessons which, leading her to acquaintance with the natural depravity of her own heart, brought her spirit in strong feelings of self-abasement to the foot of the cross, where, in the exercise of repentance and faith, she received the assurance of adoption, and, as the result, was enabled to rejoice in the God of her salvation.

In the year 1780 she joined herself to the Wesleyan society, receiving her first ticket from the hand of its venerable Founder, and from that happy hour, to the still more blissful one in which "mortality was swallowed up of life," she moved among the members of this body, in a ceaseless round of honourable service, adorning her Christian profession by singular devotedness, unhesitating fidelity, and rare consistency.

A short extract from her diary, which she kept about this time, will show how firm she was of purpose, and with how great advantage she had learned the lessons of her heavenly Teacher:—"O thou great author of all good, do thou teach me to employ every moment to thy glory. Overshadow me with thy presence, continue to guard my weakness; help me to devote every remaining hour to thy service. How often, when I should have employed my time in the service of my God, have I been searching after vain and trifling things!" Again, with a heart overflowing with a sense of that love which passeth knowledge, she exclaims, "I am unspeakably happy. My soul seems released from every burden! I can rejoice in the forgiving love of God! O my Father, do thou overshadow me with thy presence; save me from the numerous evils to which my inexperienced youth is exposed, and let me live to thee!"

In the eighteenth year of her age, Miss Agnes Collinson was married to Mr. Bulmer, of London; and in this new relation of life she identified her conduct with all "that is lovely, and of good report." She had a heart capable of the deepest and purest affections; a mind singularly well-constituted; and an intellect of so lofty an order, as to enable her to imbibe continuously, and apply to her own increasing mental strength, those stores of knowledge which the research and wisdom of ages have laid open to the inquiring and the diligent. Though possessing a devoted attachment to the object of her choice, and not in any way neglecting the duties which were associated with her new and important situation, she supplied her thirsting mind with pure draughts from the well-spring of wisdom; nor did she relax in those sublime exercises, which related to the well-being of her immortal soul. To her estimable husband she was, in its strict sense, "a help meet." As a wife, her influence was, what it well might be, boundless; and was ever exerted for the promotion of his interests in both worlds.

The reader who is expecting extraordinary incidents or striking features in this general sketch of Mrs. Bulmer's life, will

most assuredly be disappointed. True it is, that her mental energy could have had hold upon mighty objects, and its strength have grasped them tenaciously; but her constitutional timidity was so great, as even to forbid that measure of publicity to which her standing in the church, and her talents for edification, ought to have compelled her to submit. Her Christian course was full of beauty, and shone mildly and purely even in that retiring path of simplicity in which it was her choice to move. The quiet serenity of her mind, and the scriptural character of her daily experience, formed a practical comment upon that divine truth: "Great peace have they that love thy law." Taught, by Him who is "the way, and the truth, and the life," the line of demarcation between this world's shadows, and the realities of "an enduring substance," she dwelt above earthly attractions and fruitless anxieties; her spirit, continually ascending in aspirations, strong and fervent, after "the peace which passeth all understanding;" for in her estimate of happiness these communions with God constituted the deepest emotions of hope and pleasure. All her admirable talents were pressed into the service of her divine Master. She considered them as distinctively given for the benefit of her fellow-creatures, and the promotion of the interests of the Redeemer's kingdom. Hence, her remarkable devotedness to God, her anxiety for the souls of those over whom she had the charge; and her uniform practice of introducing religious truths in every conversation with her friends. And here she was peculiarly happy. She would begin some general interesting subject, drawing nearer and closer to sacred ground, till religion became the all-absorbing topic; and then, so interesting was her manner, so lucid were her views, and so elevated her own feelings, that one seemed to catch a spark of her spirit, and to retire from her society with an instructed and edified heart.

By persons who are satisfied with humble attainments in religion, it will scarcely be apprehended at what heights of spirituality a truly devoted soul may arrive. There is a region elevated high above the tainted atmosphere of this world, to which the immortal spirit may ascend, and, free from earthly perturbations, hold converse with the Deity. Our admirable friend had discovered and entered into this region; and while she looked on all the plain below, heard the sighing of the captive, and beheld the sore bondage under which her fellow-mortals groaned, and besought Him who had been "lifted up" to draw all men unto him, her own soul walked abroad in the full liberty of the children of God; sustained in vigour and freshness by "the manna which came down from heaven," by the stream gushing from the living Rock which was smitten for her. This inward separation from the world will be scarcely understood by those professing Christians whose senses must be impressed with a thing before they can believe it to exist, and who measure others by their own scanty line. Such separation, however, is nevertheless practicable, and Mrs. Bulmer was an undeniable witness of its truth. She knew that "the Son of man hath power upon earth to forgive sins," and she constantly and earnestly sought to be cleansed from all unrighteousness, and to "be filled with all the fulness of God."

It was in the autumn of 1795 that my revered and beloved parents, Dr. Adam and Mrs. Clarke, first became acquainted with the subject of this memoir. She was then in the twenty-first year of her age; and, I have heard my mother say, was one of the most interesting young women she ever met with. I recollect her narrating to me her early impression respecting Mrs. Bulmer, in the following words:—"The first time I saw her was in the old chapel at Spitalfields; and so strong was the feeling of my mind towards her, that I could not help, at the close of the service, inquiring who the young lady was to whom I had felt so irresistible an attraction." This was introduction enough. When they met on the next day they felt that they were not strangers. My father was equally pleased with her; and at that hour commenced a friendship which, built upon the only sure foundation, proved so strong, so rational, and so abiding, as to have withstood the varied trials of nearly forty years. From this time the intercourse of these choice friends was of constant recurrence; and for the three years of my father's ministerial la-

\* The author means, I suppose, that our Lord and his apostles, in common with their nation, used this phrase to express the authority and government of the divine Messiah. That our Lord attached to it a very different meaning from the one in which it was understood by the great body of the Jews, and the Apostles themselves originally, who employed the phrase to express their own idea of a temporal reign, is too evident to require any proof. See Robinson's Sermon from Whitt's Clavis, under *Sanctus*, No. 1.—T.