

science of him whose business is to develop, and to guard, and to nurture its yet unawakened sensibility. This is like removing baptism upward on a higher vantage ground. It is assigning for it a station of command and of custody at the very fountain head of moral influence; and we repeat it to be well that Christianity should have here fixed one of its sacraments; that it should have reared such a security around the birth of every immortal; that it should have so constituted baptism, as to render it a guide and a guardian, whose post is by the cradle of the infant spirit; and which, from coming into contact with the first elements of tuition, has, we doubt not, from this presiding eminence, done much to sustain and perpetuate the faith of the Gospel from generation to generation.

We have one observation more. Baptism, viewed as a seal, marks the promise of God, to grant the righteousness of faith to him who is impressed by it; but, viewed as a sign, it marks the existence of this faith. But if it be not a true sign, it is not an obligatory seal. He who believes and is baptized shall be saved. But he who is baptized and believes not shall be damned. It is not the circumcision which availeth, but a new creature. It is not the baptism which availeth, but the answer of a good conscience. God hath given a terrible demonstration of the utter worthlessness of a sign that is deceitful, and hath let us know that on that event as a seal it is dissolved. He thus stands emancipated from all his promises; and adds to his direct vengeance upon iniquity, a vengeance for the hypocrisy of its lying ceremonial. When a whole circumcised nation lost the spirit, though they retained the letter of the ordinance, he swept it away. The presence of the letter, we have no doubt, heightened the provocation; and beware, ye parents, who regularly hold up your children to the baptism of water, and make their baptism by the Holy Ghost no part of your concern or of your prayer, lest you hereby swell the judgments of the laud, and bring down the sore displeasure of God upon your families.

This affords, we think, something more than a dubious glimpse into the question that is often put by a distracted mother, when her babe is taken away from her; when all the converse it ever had with the world amounted to the gaze upon it of a few months, or a few opening smiles, which marked the dawn of life enjoyment; and ere it had reached perhaps the lip of infancy, it, all unconscious of death, had to wrestle through a period of sickness with its power, and at length to be overcome by it. O it little knew what an interest it had created in that home where it was so passing a visitant; nor, when carried to its early grave, what a tide of emotion it would raise among the few acquaintances it had left behind it! On it, too, baptism was impressed as a seal, and as a sign it was never falsified. There was no positive unbelief in its little bosom; no resistance yet put forth to the truth; no love at all for the darkness rather than the light; nor had it yet fallen into that great condemnation which will attach to all who perish because of unbelief, that their deeds are evil. It is interesting to know that God instituted circumcision for the infant children of the Jews, and at least suffered baptism for the infant children of those who profess Christianity. Should the child die in infancy, the use of baptism as a sign has never been thwarted by it; and may we not be permitted to indulge a hope so pleasing, as that the use of baptism as a seal remains in all its entireness, that He who sanctioned the affixing of it to a babe will fulfil upon it the whole expression of this ordinance! And when we couple with this the known disposition of our great Forerunner; the love that he manifested to children on earth; how he suffered them to approach his person; and, lavishing endearment and kindness upon them in the streets of Jerusalem, told his disciples that the presence and company of such as these in heaven formed one ingredient of the joy that was set before him: tell us if Christianity do not throw a pleasing radiance around an infant's tomb! And should any parent who hears us feel softened by the touching remembrance of a light that twinkled a few short months under his roof, and at the end of its little period expired; we cannot think that we venture too far when we say that he has only to persevere in the faith and in the following of the Gospel, and that very

light will again shine upon him in heaven. The blossom which withered here upon its stalk had been transplanted there to a place of endurance; and it will then gladden that eye which now weeps out the agony of an affection that has been sorely wounded; and in the name of Him who if on earth would have wept along with them, do we bid all believers present to sorrow not even as others which have no hope; but to take comfort in the thought of that country where there is no sorrow and no separation.

"O when a mother meets on high
The babe she lost in infancy,
Hath she not then, for cares and fears,
The day of woe, the watchful night,
For all her sorrows, all her tears,
An over-payment of delight!"

We have put forth these remarks, not for the purpose of inspiring a very violent distaste towards the practice of others in respect of baptism, but of reconciling you to your own; and of protecting you from any disturbance of mind on account of their arguments. It forms no peculiarity of the age in which we live, that men differ so much in matters connected with Christianity; but it forms a very pleasing peculiarity that men can do now what they seldom did before: they can agree to differ. With zeal for the essentials, they can now tolerate each other in the circumstantialities of their faith; and under all the variety which they wear, whether of complexion or of outward observance, can recognise the brotherhood of a common doctrine, and of a common spirit, among very many of the modern denominations of Christendom. The line which measures off the ground of vital and evangelical religion from the general ungodliness of our world, must never be effaced from observation; and the latitudinarianism which would tread it under foot must be fairly avoided; and an impregnable sacredness must be thrown around that people who stand peculiarized by their devotedness and their faith from the general bulk of a species who are of the earth and earthly. There are land marks between the children of light and the children of darkness, which can never be moved away; and it were well that the habit of professing Christians was more formed on the principle of keeping up that limit of separation which obtains between the church and the world; so that they who fear God should talk often together; and when they do go forth by any voluntary movement of their own on those who fear Him not, they should do it in the spirit and with the compassionate purpose of Missionaries. But while we hold it necessary to raise and to strengthen the wall by which the fold is surrounded; and that not for the purpose of intercepting the flow of kindness and of Christian philanthropy from within, but for the purpose of intercepting the streams of contamination from without; we should like to see all the lines of partition that have been drawn in the fold itself utterly swept away. This is fair ground for the march of latitudinarianism; and that, not for the object of thereby putting down the signals of distinction between one party of Christians and another, but, allowing each to wear its own, for the object of associating them by all the ties and the recognitions of Christian fellowship. In this way, we apprehend that there will come at length to be the voluntary surrender of many of our existing distinctions, which will far more readily give way by being tolerated than by being fought against. And this is just the feeling in which we regard the difference that obtains on the subject of baptism. It may subside into one and the same style of observance, or it may not. It is one of those inner partitions which may at length be overthrown by mutual consent; but, in the mean time, let the portals of a free admittance upon both sides be multiplied as fast as they may along the whole extent of it; and let it no longer be confounded with the outer wall of the great Christian temple, but be instantly recognised as the slender partition of one of its apartments, and the door of which is opened for the visits of welcome and kind intercourse to all the other members of the Christian family. Let it never be forgotten of the Particular Baptists of England, that they form the denomination of Fuller, and Carey, and Ryland, and Hall, and Foster; that they have originated among the greatest of all Missionary enterprises; that they have enriched the Christian literature of our country with authorship of the most exalted piety, as well as of the first talent, and the first

eloquence; that they have waged a very noble and successful war with the hydra of Antinomianism, that perhaps there is not a more intellectual community of Ministers in our island, or who have put forth to their number a greater amount of mental power and mental activity in the defence and illustration of our common faith, and, what is better than all the triumphs of genius or understanding, who, by their zeal, and fidelity, and pastoral labour, among the congregations which they have reared, have done more to swell the lists of genuine discipleship in the walks of private society; and thus both to uphold and to extend the living Christianity of our nation.—Chalmers.

Biblical Literature.

LAWS OF INTERPRETATION.

I. The first of all the laws of interpretation is certainly this: to endeavour to investigate the sense of a writing or passage which is to be interpreted according to the signification which the general usage of the language, or also the well known particular usage of the writer, connects with the words which he employs. The rule, in one word, amounts to this; we should seek, in the first place, the literal sense of every passage to be interpreted, as it must be afforded, either by the general usage, or by one which is peculiar to the writer. But why this must be sought first, is a point which need not be explained to any one; for every man's natural sense will tell him why, and will also instinctively bring him first to this means of exposition.

It is indeed natural for every one to presume, that a man who intends to make himself understood by another, can use his words only in a sense which others also attach to them, or, if he uses them in another sense, can only use them in such a one as others will immediately recognise to be his. The reader will therefore take his expressions only in a signification in which every other man takes them when they occur also elsewhere, or in that in which he is elsewhere, as is well known, accustomed to employ them. Let a man first investigate this with care, and in most cases he will find very little more to be necessary in order to determine the true sense of his author.

This no one has doubted, and no one can doubt, who is possessed of a sound understanding. Still, there have been expositors, as will be noticed hereafter in the history of this subject, who have maintained, that different principles may apply to the Bible; who, for this very reason, do not deserve to be refuted. Yet, if all had agreed in this—if all interpreters had proceeded on this first law of exposition, it would still be very easy to explain how the greatest variety of interpretations must, notwithstanding, be introduced, and equally evident is it whence they must spring.

In the application of this principle all depends on the correctness and accuracy of our knowledge of language, and these can, must, and will ever be exceedingly various. When an interpreter understands an expression merely according to the proper, and not also according to the figurative signification, which the usage of language attaches to it, what widely different expositions must he sometimes produce from the exposition given by others! Another may indeed have a sufficiently full and correct acquaintance with the general usage of language; he may know with great accuracy all the significations in which a word is generally taken, while, at the same time, the peculiar usage of the writer is unknown to him; consequently, he does not know the precise meaning in which the writer is accustomed to use the word. How different then must be the sense which he finds, from that which another derives by means of a nicer knowledge of language! And if again another explains, according to the pure Greek idiom, what a third perceives to be a peculiarity of the Hellenistic dialect, how remarkably must their interpretations vary, merely from this one cause!

Scarcely any thing but this single consideration, founded on fact, that in different periods of Christianity, and among its different sects, the knowledge of language has been exceedingly various, is necessary, in order to show most plainly, how, in different ages and among different sects, such vastly diversified and in part contradictory materials could be found in the Bible. All, or at least much, the greater number (for also, the remark is not true of all) had

understanding enough to discern, that in explaining Scripture it must be the first care to understand the sense in which the expressions of the writers were in part generally employed in other places, and in part by themselves in particular. They all perceived too, that, for this purpose, it was necessary to become acquainted both with the language in general, and with the particular usage of the writers. Many of them supposed that they had formed such an acquaintance; but how did this knowledge of language appear in certain periods!

Was there not a time, when it was thought that every thing in the Bible must be interpreted properly,* because the figurative language of the East was utterly unknown! Was there not another time, when expositors would see no Hebrewisms in the language of the New Testament, because it was taken for granted, that all which the Holy Spirit communicated by inspiration to the apostles must be pure Greek! And was there not again another, and a long period, when men could find no other sense in the expressions of Scripture, but what the doctrinal usage of language belonging to later centuries had connected with them, without a suspicion that they themselves and their age could have attached to them any other ideas!

The result is evident. It is equally evident that such a result could not but take place; and moreover, it is now evident, and the reason is also clear, that interpretation could not make sure progress, until sacred philology was cultivated with more zeal, and with the assistance of superior aids, with better taste and more learning. ONLY THE PHILOLOGIST CAN BE AN INTERPRETER. It is true, that the office of interpretation requires more than mere philology or an acquaintance with language; but all those other qualifications that may belong to it are useless without this acquaintance, whilst, on the contrary, in very many cases nothing more than this is necessary, for correct interpretation.

The truth of this observation will be shown by the additional general laws of interpretation, which must now be adduced, in reference to those cases, which mere knowledge of language is not sufficient to explain.

II. The second general law of interpretation is this: always to explain with a view to the spirit and mode of thinking of the age for which a writing was immediately intended; or, to express this in clearer and more general terms,—that may always be considered as the true sense of the writer to be explained, which, either alone, or at least as the most natural sense, could be suggested by his expressions to the men, to whom and for whom he wrote.†

When the rule is expressed in this form, the reason of it also is so clearly recognised, that no development can be necessary even to the most uneducated man. Every writer wishes indeed to be understood naturally. Consequently, he will not only always employ his expressions in the sense which his readers will connect with them, but, in the ideas which he communicates to them, he will always be governed by their ability to comprehend, and will pay regard to their particular manner of forming conceptions of subjects, and this either intentionally, or because, as it is common to the whole age, it is also his own.

* That is, literally.

† To prevent the possibility of misapprehending the author's meaning, I beg leave to suggest—what, however, can hardly escape the observation of all discerning readers,—that the rule does not direct the interpreter to allow the spirit and mode of thinking of the age to modify or do away the evident meaning of a passage, but merely to assist him in ascertaining what the meaning is. In connection with the subject it may be proper to add another consideration, in itself very evident, and yet not sufficiently attended to by some modern commentators. Before the interpreter appeals to the spirit and mode of thinking of his author's age, in order to illustrate a supposed difficulty, let him ascertain with as much certainty as the case will admit, what that spirit is, and how it is to be applied to the subject. It is said by some commentators, that the narrative of our Lord's temptation is only a parabolic representation of evil and distressing thoughts arising in his mind, which he strongly repressed and thus prevented the natural result of such reflections; and this they say is represented, agreeably to the Jewish manner, and in the spirit of the apostolic age, as if the devil had assailed him with temptations. So again, the account of an appearance of an angel to Zacharias, and also to Mary, merely denotes the providential agency of God, expressed according to the mode of thinking prevalent at that time. Before such representations of apparent facts can advance any reasonable claim to attention, it ought to be shown that such was the manner of thinking, and of expressing one's thoughts in plain prose composition, among the Jews, when the New Testament was written. Any reference to the machinery of poetry would be entirely irrelevant. Let the reader determine what the author says of the abuse of higher criticism; page 165.—T.