

The Old Year's Blessing.

ABELAIDE PROCTOR.

I am fading from you. But one draweth near. Called the Angel-guardian Of the coming year.

If my gifts and graces Coldly you forget, Let the New Year's Angel Bless and crown them yet.

For we work together; He and I are one; Let him and me perfect All I leave undone.

I brought Good Desires, Though as yet but seeds; Let the New Year make them Blossom into Deeds.

I brought Joy to brighten Many happy days; Let the New Year's Angel Turn it into Fraught.

If I gave you Sickness, If I brought you Care, Let him make one Patient, And the other Prayer.

Where I brought you Sorrow, Through his care, at length, It may rise triumphant Into future Strength.

If I brought you Plenty, All wealth's bounteous charms, Shall not the New Year Turn them into Arms?

I gave Health and Leisure, Still to dream and stray; Let him make them quiet, — Work for God and Man.

If I broke your idols, Showed you they were dust, Let him turn the Knowledge Into heavenly Trust.

If I brought Temptation, Let sin die away Into boundless bliss; For all hearts that stray.

If your list of Errors Dark and long appears, Let this New Year's March Melt them into Tears.

May you hold this Angel Dearer than the last — So I bless his nature, While he crowns my Past.

ENCYCLICAL LETTER

Of Our Holy Father by Divine Providence Pope Leo XIII.

ON THE STUDY OF HOLY SCRIPTURE.

To Our Venerable Brethren, all Patriarchs, Primate, Archbishops, and Bishops of the Catholic World, in Grace and Communion with the Apostolic See, Pope Leo XIII.

Venerable Brethren, Health and Apostolic Benediction.

CONTINUED FROM LAST WEEK.

It should not be forgotten what a great number of learned personages, belonging mostly to the religious orders, exerted themselves in forwarding Biblical studies from the Council of Vienna to the Council of Trent. These grace to new help, to their wide erudition, and to their singular talents, not only increased the riches accumulated by their predecessors but prepared in some sense the way for the savants of the succeeding age, during which, after the Council of Trent, the prosperous epoch of the Fathers of the Church, appeared in some sort to have recommenced. Nobody ignorant, in short, and it is sweet to us to bring it to mind that our predecessors, from Pius IV. to Clement VIII., took measures to have remarkable editions of the ancient versions—those of Alexandria and the Vulgate. These, which subsequently appeared by order and under the authority of Sixtus Quintus and the same Clement, are to day in common use. It is also known that the Polygot editions of Antwerp and Paris, so well calculated to develop the exact meaning of the text, were brought out, as well as other ancient versions of the Bible.

There is not a single book of the two Testaments which did not then meet more than one able interpreter. There is not a single question touching these subjects which did not exercise in the most fruitful fashion the capacity of many learned men among whom a certain number, above all those who studied the Holy Fathers the most, secured a remarkable reputation.

In fine, from that epoch zeal has not been wanting to our commentators. Distinguished men have profited by their Biblical studies and have defended Holy Writ against the attacks of rationalism, attacks drawn from philology and analogous sciences, and which they have refuted by arguments from similar sources.

All those who will consider this review, without prejudice beforehand, will certainly accord to us that the Church has never been lacking in foresight, that it has always let flow towards its children the healthful springs of Holy Writ, that it has always depended on this support, to the guardianship of which it has been pre-ordained by God, that it has fortified it by every species of protection, so that it has never needed, nor never will need, to be stimulated by those who are foreign to it.

The plan We have traced for Ourselves, Venerable Brethren, demands that We should have an understanding and with you as to what seems the best means for the good regulation of these studies. But, at first, We must single out those who oppose obstacles to us and the methods and arms to which they trust. Formerly the Holy See had to do, above all, with those who relied on private judgment, and repudiating the divers traditions and authority of the Church, affirmed that Scriptures were the unique source of revelation and the sovereign judge of faith. At present our principal adversaries are rationalists, who, sons and heirs, so to speak, of the men whom We mentioned above, and basing their notions on their individual opinions, have rejected wholesale even the doctrines of Christian faith still accepted by their

predecessors. They absolutely deny all inspiration; they reject Holy Writ, and proclaim that all sacred objects are human inventions and artifacts; they regard the Sacred Books not as containing the exact narrative of real events, but as inept fables and lying histories. To their eyes there are no prophecies, but predictions forged after the occurrences had taken place, or, rather, presentiments due to natural causes; miracles really worthy of the name do not exist; they are not manifestations of the divine power but surprising facts, which by no means transcend the forces of nature or of illusions and myths; finally, they hold that the Gospel and the writings of the Apostles do not emanate from those to whom they are attributed. To reinforce those errors, by means of which they believe they can annihilate the holy truth of Scripture, they invoke the decisions of a new free science. These decisions are so dubious to the clouded visions of those rationalists that they vary and often contradict each other on the self-same points. And while men judge and speak in so impious a fashion of God, Christ, the Gospel, and the remainder of the Scriptures, there are not wanting among them those who wish to be considered Christians, theologians, and commentators, and who, under the most honorable of names, dissemble the audacity of a spirit abounding in insolence.

To those who added a certain number of men who, urged by similar aim and co-operating with them, cultivate other sciences, and whom a like hostility to revealed truth leads to kindred attacks on the Bible. We cannot too deeply lament the extent and hourly increasing violence which these attacks assume. They are directed against informed and intelligent men, although these are thoroughly competent to defend themselves; but it is particularly against the crowd of the ignorant that these implacable enemies employ every weapon of assault. By means of books, pamphlets and newspapers they spread the deadly poison; by meetings and speeches they sink it more profoundly into the public mind. Already they have carried on a general invasion, and possess numerous schools ravished from the Church, descending even to the miserable corruption by mockery and jibe of the still fresh and credulous hearts of youth, they excite them to the contempt of Holy Writ.

In that, Venerable Brethren, there is much to move and animate the common zeal of pastors so that to this new and false science should be lifted up the antique and veracious doctrine which the Church received from Christ by the intermediary of the Apostles, and which, in such a struggle, is always displayed by the able champions of Holy Writ.

This, then, should be our duty, that in the seminaries and the universities divine literature should be taught in every respect as the importance of the science and the requirements of the actual epoch demand. For this reason prudence in the choice of professors should be held nearly to heart. For this function must be selected not men taken amongst the crowd but those who are recommended by a great love and a long practice of the Bible, and a veritable scientific culture—men, in a word, who rise to the height of their mission. Less care must not be expended in the preparation of those who are to succeed them. It is Our pleasure, therefore, that everywhere where it is possible those should be chosen as disciples who have traversed in a satisfactory manner the cycle of theological studies, a certain number of whom will devote themselves entirely to the acquisition of knowledge of the Holy Book, and to whom the possibility of giving themselves up more extended familiarity will be furnished. When the masters shall have been thus singled out and formed, they should confer on the task confided to them with confidence, and that they may be able to discharge their duties well and obtain the results to be expected. We wish to impart to them more developed instructions.

At the outset of their studies they should examine into the nature of the intelligence of their disciples, cultivate it, in fact, so as to fit them at once to preserve intact the doctrine of the Holy Writings and to comprehend their spirit. Such is the object of "The Treatise on the introduction to the Bible," which supplies the pupil with the means of proving the integrity and authenticity of the Bible, of searching and discovering the true meaning of passages, of boldly attacking and extricating to the root sophistical interpretations. It is hardly needful to indicate how important it is to discuss these points from the commencement with order and in a scientific way, having recourse to theology, for in verity, the study of the Scriptures is built upon this foundation and illuminated by those light. The professor should apply himself scrupulously to make the most fruitful part of this science perfectly understood—that which concerns interpretation—and to explain to his auditors how they may utilize the riches of the divine word for the advantage of religion and piety. Assuredly, We understand that neither the extent of the subject nor the time disposable will permit the entire circle of the Scriptures to be gone over in the schools. But since it is necessary to possess a sure method fruitfully to direct interpretation, a wise master must avoid the mistake of those who take up for study passages selected here and there in the books, and likewise the method of those who settle on a determined chapter of a single book. If in the majority of schools one cannot attain the same end as in the higher academies—that is, that one book or

another may be expounded in a consecutive and elaborate manner—at least every exertion should be exercised that the passages chosen for interpretation should be studied with sufficient completeness. Pupils allured in a sense, and instructed by this mode of explanation, might be able to repulse and resist the rest of the Bible for the duration of life. The professor, faithful to the prescriptions of those who have preceded us, should use the Vulgate version. It is that, in truth, which the Council of Trent has designed as authentic and suitable to be employed "in public readings, discussions, preachings, and explanations," and that which is also recommended by the daily practice of the Church. Nevertheless, We do not wish to say that no account must be taken of other versions which the Christians of the early ages adopted with eulogy, especially those of the primitive texts. In fact as far as concerns the material points, the sense is clear according to the Hebrew and Greek editions of the Vulgate, nevertheless, if an ambiguous passage, or one less clear than usual is met, "recourse to the preceding language," as St. Augustine counsels, will be very useful. It is palpable that a great deal of circumspection must be brought to this task, for it is the duty of the commentator to indicate what he thinks himself but that which was thought by the author whom he explains. After the reading shall have been carefully conducted to the given point, then the moment will arrive to search into and explain the sense. Our first advice on this subject is to observe the prescriptions commonly in use relative to the interpretation, the more assiduously as the attacks of adversaries are more active. We must therefore cautiously weigh the value of the words themselves, the significance of the context, the similitude of passages and the like, and also improve the opportunity of the strange elucidations of the science opposed to us. Nevertheless, the master must beware not to bestow more time and care to these questions than to the study of the divine books themselves, lest too extensive and profound a knowledge of those topics should bring more trouble than strength to the intellect of youth. Hence it results that the sure course to pursue is the study of Holy Writ from the theological point of view.

On this subject it is necessary to remark that in addition to the causes of difficulty which present themselves in the explanation of no matter what ancient authors, others have to be supplemented which are peculiar to the explanation of the Sacred Writings. Inasmuch as they are the work of the Holy Ghost, the words conceal a number of truths which are far surpassing the strength and penetration of human reason—that is to say, the divine mysteries and all which belong to them. The sense is sometimes wider and more veiled than would appear to be conveyed by the letter and by the rules of hermeneutics, and, furthermore, the literal sense itself sometimes hides other senses which serve to elucidate dogmas or to give rules for the conduct of life. Thus, it cannot be denied that the Holy Books are shrouded with a certain religious obscurity to such an extent that nobody should undertake their study without a guide. Thus God has desired—it is the common opinion of the Fathers—that men should study them with more ardour and carefulness, that truths laboriously acquired should penetrate more deeply into their intellects and their hearts, in order that they might understand above all that God has given the Scriptures that in the interpretation of His words she should be accepted as the surest guide and master.

Where God has placed His treasures there truth should be sought. The men in whom resides the succession of the Apostles, as St. Irenaeus has already taught us, explain the Scriptures without danger. It is his doctrine and that of the other Fathers which the Vatican Council adopted when renewing a Decree of the Council of Trent on the interpretation of the Divine Written Word. It decided that in things of faith and morals tending to the settlement of Christian doctrine that should be regarded as the exact sense of the Scriptures which our holy mother the Church has regarded and regards as such, for it is her province to judge of the sense and interpretation of the Sacred Books. Consequently, no one is permitted to expound the Scriptures in a fashion contrary to this meaning or the unanimous consent of the Fathers.

By this law, full of wisdom the Church does not arrest or retard in the slightest degree the researches of Biblical science, but maintains them in the shelter of all error, and piously contributes to their veritable progress. Each doctor, in short, sees open before him a vast field wherein, by following a sure direction, his zeal may be exercised in a signal manner and with profit to the Church. Of a truth, as to those passages of Holy Writ which await certain and well defined explanation, thanks to the benevolent design of the Providence of God, it may be that the judgment of the Church will find itself ripened by preparatory studies. But, touching those points which have been already settled, the Doctor may play an equally efficacious role, either in more clearly expounding them to the crowd of the faithful or in a more subtle way to the educated, or in defending them more strongly from the adversaries of the faith. The Catholic interpreter should accordingly, as a most important and sacred duty, explain in the

fixed sense these texts of Scripture whose signification has been authentically indicated, whether by sacred writers whom the guidance of the Holy Ghost inspired, as occurs in many passages of the New Testament, or by the Church, assisted by the same Holy Ghost and by the means of a solemn judgment, or by its universal and ordinary authority. He should be convinced that this interpretation is the only one that can be approved by the laws of sacred hermeneutics. Upon other points he must follow the analogy of the faith and take for model Catholic doctrine as it is indicated by the authority of the Church. In fact, it is the same God who is the author of the Holy Writing and of the doctrine of which the Church is the storehouse. It absolutely follows, then, that a signification attributed to the former later cannot be produced from a legitimate interpretation. Hence, it evidently results that every interpretation which puts the sacred text in contradiction with themselves, or which is opposed to the teaching of the Church, is foolish and false.

He who teaches Holy Writ should also merit the eulogy that he is a thorough master of theology, that he is perfectly conversant with the comments of the holy Fathers, the Doctors, and the best interpreters. Such is the doctrine of St. Jerome and St. Augustine, who justly complain in these terms, "If every science, however unimportant and easy of acquisition, demands, as is evident, to be taught by a learned man, by a master, what could be more arrogantly rash than not to seek the knowledge of the Holy Scriptures after the teaching of their interpreters?" Such was likewise the testimony of our Fathers, who confirmed it by examples. They explained the Scriptures, not after their private opinions, but from the writing and authority of their predecessors, because it was evident that these had received in succession to the Apostles the rules for the interpretation of Holy Writ.

The testimony of the holy Fathers, who, after the Apostles, have been, so to speak, the fathers of the Holy Church, its builders, its pastors, have nourished and made it grow, has also a great authority every time they explain, in one and the same manner, a Biblical text as concerning faith or morals; for it is clear from their agreement that, according to Catholic doctrine, this explanation has come in its form by tradition from the Apostles. The advice of the same Fathers is also worthy of being taken into very serious consideration when they treat of the same subjects as Doctors and as giving their private opinion. Indeed, not only their knowledge of revealed doctrine and the multitude of the acquisitions necessary to interpret the Apostolic books powerfully recommend them, but, moreover, God Himself has bestowed freely His success and His lights on these men, remarkable for the sanctity of their lives and their zeal for the truth.

Let the interpreter learn, then, that he is bound to follow their footsteps with respect, and avail himself of their labors with an intelligent discrimination. Nevertheless, he must not believe that the road is blocked, and that he cannot, where a reasonable doubt exists, go farther in the line of research and explanation. It is allowable for him, provided he always follows the sage precept of St. Augustine, "do not stray in the slightest from the literal and plain sense unless when there is some reason which forbids him to agree with it, or renders it necessary to be abandoned." This rule should be observed with more firmness, that, in the midst of the great ardour of innovation and the freedom of opinion, there exists a very grave danger of going wrong. He who teaches the Scriptures must take care not to neglect the allegorical or analogical sense attached by the holy Fathers to certain words, particularly when the meaning naturally flows from the literal sense, and is supported by a large number of authorities.

The Church, in fact, has received from the Apostles the mode of interpretation, and has approved of it by its example, as shown by the liturgy. It is not that the Fathers pretended to demonstrate by themselves the dogmas of faith, but that they have experienced that this method was good to nurse virtue and piety. The authority of other Catholic interpreters of a truth is less, nevertheless, since Biblical studies have made a continuous progress in the Church, the honor which is their due should be rendered to these Doctors, and one can borrow from their works many arguments useful for repelling attacks and clearing up points of controversy. But that which is unsuitable is that the interpreter, ignoring or despising the excellent volumes which our co-religionists have left us in considerable numbers, should prefer heterodox works, and that to the imminent risk of sound doctrine and too often to the detriment of the faith, he should search in them for the explanation of passages on which Catholics have long and valuably exercised their talents and multiplied their labors. Although, undeniably, the studies of the heterodox, wisely utilized, may sometimes aid the Catholic interpreter, it is needful for him, notwithstanding, to recollect after the numerous proofs given by the ancients that the unaltered sense of Holy Scriptures is to be found nowhere outside the holy Church, and cannot be given by those who, deprived of the true faith, cannot reach the marrow of Holy Writ, but only nibble at the rind. It is especially necessary that the practice of Scriptures should spread itself all over

theology and become in a manner its soul. Such has been at every age the doctrine of all the Fathers and of the most remarkable theologians—doctrine which they have supported by their example. They devoted themselves to the establishing and strengthening by the Holy Books all the verities which are the object of faith, and those which flow from them; and it is these Holy Books, as well as divine tradition, which they have employed to refute the novel inventions of heretics, to discover the *raison d'être* (cause of being), the explanation and the interdependence of Catholic dogmas.

There is nothing surprising in that to him who reflects on the immense space the Holy Books occupy among the sources of divine revelation. To such a measure is this true that, without their study and daily usage, theology could not be treated in a way appropriate and worthy of such a science. No doubt it is good that young people in the seminaries and universities should be trained to acquire an understanding and knowledge of dogmas, and that, starting from the articles of faith, they should deduce their consequences by ratiocination, established on the rules of tried and solid philosophy. All the same, the serious and instructed theologian should not neglect the interpretation of dogmas based on the authority of the Bible. In fact, theology draws its principles from other sciences, but immediately from God by revelation. Furthermore, it has not recourse to these sciences as its superior, but employs them as its inferior and its servants. This method of teaching the sacred science is indicated and recommended by the prince of theologians, St. Thomas Aquinas. In addition, he showed how the character of the science he cultivated could defend its principles did any one attack them. "In reasoning, should the adversary accord some of the truths which are transmitted to us by revelation, it is through the means of Holy Writ we should carry on discussion with heretics, and use one article of faith against those who deny another. On the contrary, if the adversary believes in nothing which is divinely revealed, there remains no longer to prove to him articles of faith by reasoning, but to capsize his reasonings against the faith."

We should, then, be solicitous that our young people march to the combat properly instructed in Biblical knowledge, in order that they may not frustrate our legitimate hopes, nor what would be much more serious—that they thoughtlessly run the risk of falling into error, led astray by the false promises of rationalists and the phantom of a superficial erudition. But they will be completely ready for the struggle if, after the method which We ourselves have indicated and prescribed, they cultivate religiously and profoundly the study of philosophy and theology, under the guidance of St. Thomas Aquinas. Thus they will be certain to make sure progress not merely in Biblical science but in the domain of theology called positive.

Certes, it is much that the truth of Catholic doctrine has been proved, and that that doctrine has been explained and elucidated, thanks to the legitimate and accomplished interpretation of the Bible, but there remains to be established another point as important as the work necessary to arrive at it is considerable—that the complete authority of the Scriptures should be demonstrated as solidly as possible. This object cannot be obtained in a full and complete manner except by the proper and ever-enduring magistracy of the Church, which, "by herself, by her admirable diffusion, her eminent holiness, her inexhaustible productivity of every species of good, her Catholic unity and invincible stability, is a grand and perpetual motive of *credibility* and an irrefragable proof of the divine mission."

But since the divine and infallible magistracy of the Church reposes on the authority of Holy Writ, at least human belief in it must at the outset be affirmed and reinvigorated. From these books, in fact, as from witnesses, the most experienced of antiquity, the divinity and mission of the Christ God, the institution of the hierarchy of the Church, the primacy conferred on Peter and his successors are to be brought in evidence and confidently established.

TO BE CONTINUED.

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