

which I am contending has been by some almost elevated into an article of the faith; viz: the meliorating effort upon the mind of man, of earnest, honest, thoughtful study of the plain text of the Bible without note or comment. I know that that Book is not like any other book, that it is the word of God, and that His Holy Spirit, whose office it is to guide men into all knowledge, interprets to the pious reader. But in the mode and manner of attaining to a fruitful knowledge of scripture the same principle holds which obtains in other branches of learning. And that exaltation of the spiritually educative value of the Bible without note or comment, is (though it is sometimes attended with an undue disparagement of other means) not the cry of a narrow and illiberal fanaticism but the plain conclusion of common sense, warranted by reason, and extorted by experience. As in secular learning, so here, to despise, or to disparage, the labours of the critical scholar would be absurd. These labours are indispensable, we must know what the text is, and ascertain its meaning. We must know what the Bible is, and what it says; and we must put this into our own tongue. There must be men who can and will do this. Nor may we disregard systematic theology, the history of the faith, criticism, grammar, creed, history,—they are all useful,—they are all needful,—but for the ripening of the mind in sacred lore there is nothing like familiarity with the text itself, even in a translation. And that is just the case with every other lore.

And here, as I am addressing my juniors, I shall not perhaps be thought egotistical, if I speak briefly of my own experience. Young men, I was brought up at a good school, and I took my degree in the University of Oxford; but I honestly think that, in all that is valuable in my small stock of acquirement or faculty, I am a self educated man. And of my studies,—my secular studies,—I verily believe, that the most influential—the most beneficial to my intellect—were those carried on by myself out of two small volumes, for one of which I gave sixpence, and for the other of which I believe