

From the U.S. Catholic Miscellany.

BIBLE BIOGRAPHY.

In our last we noticed this work as for sale in this city, and expressed our regret that it should so needlessly be made the vehicle of the usual misrepresentation of Catholic doctrine. In "Dissertation xxv." Appendix entitled, "Figurative language of the Holy Scriptures," the reader is prepared by the words "such expressions perverted, as to support Transubstantiation" for the following passage, p. 449.

"A figurative style pervades also the New Testament, especially the edifying discourse of our blessed Lord: they are remarkably metaphorical, and easily understood; yet some ignorant persons, mistaking their meaning, have been led to adopt most extravagant notions for divine doctrine; and not a few Christians even, giving a literal application to these expressions, which were designed to be understood metaphorically. This may be illustrated best by a few examples, which will evince the impropriety of a literal translation of certain words of our Saviour.

He said also to the Jews, "I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If any man eat of this bread he shall live for ever: and the bread which I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." John vi. 51. The Jews affected at least to understand these words of Christ literally; objecting, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" Verse 52. They did not, or would not, understand that Jesus designed his life, which he was about to give as an atonement for the sins of the world, as plainly predicted in their own Scriptures."

Before we have done with this passage, we hope that the ignorance of the compiler shall be as manifest, as his bigotry.

The first statement is, that from his figurative style of discoursing, the meaning of the Saviour has been mistaken by ignorant persons, and notions the most extravagant adopted for divine doctrine. How? Because he was understood to speak literally when he intended to speak figuratively: and the case of the Jews at Capharnaum is assumed as one in point. "They did not, or would not &c" as above,

The compiler here grants that the Jews understood the Saviour to speak literally: and this admission, for reasons to be stated hereafter, is a vast stride in the examination of this celebrated chapter of St. John. We heartily agree with him and thank him for the admission. He however states that in this interpretation they were in error because Jesus intended to speak figuratively, when he said they should "eat his flesh, and drink his blood." Now if they were in error, it was one of a most serious character; and Jesus must have known that it was an error conceived from his own teaching—that he led them into it by his own expressions: he even hears them ask in disgust and incredulity "how can this man give us his flesh to eat?" his very disciples murmur, "this is a hard saying who can hear it."—Here was the case, we presume of ignorant persons mistaking his meaning, adopting notions the most extravagant for divine doctrines—"Jesus speaking figuratively, and the interpreting literally—

and all this known to Jesus, which on one word from him will remove, and that word he speaks not. Knowing that they are in error, so far from correcting it, he suffers them to depart, and live and die in it, when one word would have won them back to truth. Abandoned by the Jews and disciples, he turns to the twelve—for what purpose?—to furnish to them explanation which he withheld from the others,—no, but with his words still ringing in their ears, to ask "will you too leave me?"—In this view then—the view of the compiler, we have Jesus of Nazareth, the teacher sent by God, misleading the people he came to save: using expressions which, it is said, they misunderstood: and which he knew they misunderstood, and so far from condescending as a God of truth to explain to them, he in fact only confirms his hearers in their error, by a repetition the most solemn known to the form of teaching he adopted! Could, would Jesus, as a divine teacher act thus? We are only surprised how the advocates of such interpretation can acknowledge, if indeed they do—his divinity!

Let us however leave conjecture as to what in such a character he might, or would have done, and see by facts what he usually did; and for this purpose let us put the case thus. How did Jesus as a teacher act.

10. When speaking figuratively, the people understood him literally, and were therefore in error, and under this erroneous impression started objections to his doctrine. And

20. When speaking literally, and his hearers understanding him literally were right, but still under this right interpretation started objections to his doctrine.

From a view of his usual mode of conduct under each of these conjectures, we will be not a little aided in ascertaining that under which we are to class the case adduced by Mr. Robert Sears of New York in the appendix to his Bible Biography.

Our first position (under wise men) is: whenever Jesus speaking figuratively was understood literally and therefore the hearer was in error, he at once corrects it, and thus silences objections. Thus in Matt. XVI. 5. we read—"And when his disciples were come over the water, they had forgotten to take bread. 6. and he said to them: Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.—7. But they thought within themselves, saying: Because we have taken no bread." Here they understood him literally, but Jesus at once corrected them in the subsequent verses, and 12. "Then they understood that he said not that they should beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees. In the XII. of St. Luke we find him exhibit the same solicitude in explaining the very same phrase. He is addressing the "great multitudes that stood about him, so that they trod upon one another," and inculcating the same lesson he perceives that it was not easily understood and he at once adds the explanation—"Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, Which is hypocrisy."

We find another remarkable instance of this mode of explanation in the III. of

John relating the memorable conversation held with the Jewish Doctor. v. 3, "Jesus answered and said to him: Amen, amen I say to thee, except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." Now this amongst the Jewish doctors was expressive of proselytism. Nicodemus however takes it literally and raises his objection in the same form as the Jews at Capharnaum, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born again?" Here was an "extravagant notion for divine doctrine." Does the Saviour knowing him to be in error permit him to depart without correcting it? No: he at once explains himself, removing all doubt as to the meaning he intended to convey—"Amen, amen I say to thee, unless a man be born again of water and the Holy ghost he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God."

In the IVth of the same evangelist we find that the disciples having returned from the city, whither they had gone to buy bread, press him to eat—(the discourse with the Samaritan woman was held during their absence).—"But he said to them, I have food to eat, which you know not of." They understanding him literally "said one to another: hath any man brought him any thing to eat?" He corrects the mistake. "My food is to do the will of him that sent me."

In XIX of St. Matthew, discoursing on the danger of riches, he concludes by saying. v. 24. "And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven." They adopt the "extravagant notion" that salvation was absolutely impossible in the case, and ask "who then can be saved."—He at once removes their mistake.—"With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

Even when not engaged on doctrinal matters, we find him equally anxious to remove misconception. Look, for instance, to the XIth of St. John, recording the history of Lazarus. Having heard that the latter is sick, Jesus remains in the place two days, when he prepared to go into Judea again: and having remonstrated with the disciples, who objected, he said. "Lazarus our friend sleepeth: but I go that I may awake him out of sleep." Here they understand him literally, as they reply:—"Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well," and in so understanding him they were in error, which he at once removes as he "said to them plainly Lazarus is dead."

We have in VIII of St. John, a memorable interview between the Saviour and his enemies. The chapter opens with the attempt made to entrap him in his speech, by requesting him to pass judgment on the woman taken in adultery. He, knowing the snare laid for him, baffles their malice and then justifies his doctrine. With few exceptions do we find his enemies actuated by a more bitter spirit. Yet even here he appeared the same mild, benignant teacher, removing every difficulty, correcting ever misunderstanding on their part, though it is prompted by malice and perverseness. From the 12th v. to the 21st,

he nobly vindicates himself; "I go my way, and you shall seek me, and you shall die in your sin. Whither I go, you cannot come." They understand him in a gross material sense, "Will he kill himself, because he said, whither I go you cannot come." How meekly he corrects them—"you are from beneath, I am from above: you are of this world, I am not of this world."—Speaking as no man ever spoke, "with authority" he pursues his theme, the anger of some of his hearers kindling at every passage, till hearing him say, "the truth shall make you free"—and taking his words literally, they give loose to their pent up passions as they cry out that they were never slaves—"we," cried they indignantly, "we are the seed of Abraham; and we have never been slaves to any man; how sayest thou you shall be free?"—He immediately tells them, that he speaks—not of a literal, but a spiritual slavery.—"Amen, amen, I say unto you; that whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin. Now the servant abideth not in the house forever; but the son abideth forever. If, therefore, the son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed."

The next passage in continuation is no less remarkable. "I know that you are the children of Abraham: but you seek to kill me, because my word hath no place in you. I speak that which I have seen with my father: and you do the things that you have seen with your father. They answered, and said to him: Abraham is our father. Jesus saith to them: "If you be the children of Abraham, do the works of Abraham. But now you seek to kill me, a man who have spoken the truth to you, which I have heard from God: this Abraham did not. You do the deeds of your father."—What father? They understood him to say literally, that they were not the legitimate ascendants, and at once exclaim. "We are not born of fornication."—True to his rule, however harsh the explanation may sound in their ears, the Redeemer tells his meaning.—"You are of your father—the devil, and the desires of your father you will do."

We shall close this point by another taken from this same sixth chap. of St. John. The Saviour said, "For the bread of God is that which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life to the world," his hearers take his words literally, and cry out, "Lord give us always this bread." he corrects them by explaining himself spiritually "I am the bread of life; he that cometh to me shall not hunger; and he that believeth in me shall not thirst."

It is, we hope, now pretty clear, that the uniform mode of teaching with the Saviour was—when his hearers understood him literally, whilst he wished them to take his words figuratively, at once to correct the mistake and thus remove their difficulties. Will Mr. Robert Sears have the hardihood to say that the Saviour did so at Capharnaum, knowing as he did that they took his words literally?

Is it not at least presumable that in taking his words literally they understood him as he intended they should? For this let us view him as in case 28. namely.