

...speak of poets; but how they sink, when compared to the prophet! All that they possess—susceptibility, selection, numbers, imagery—no poet possesses too, and that in a depth and compass “above all Greek, above all Roman praise.” We speak of the poet’s eye; his piercing, ranging nature; and of the association between natural objects, and sentiments, and morals. But whither ranges the vision of the prophet? And with what does he connect the multiplied objects which nature throws around? They were indeed *seraphs*. They bring the seraphs before the throne, voicing their faces, and bending under the weight of the felicity of adoring love; and thus teach us the depth and glory of the Godhead, and that the highest employment of intellect is to meditate on God, and that the sum of rational bliss is the love of him. In the heavens, beaming with the sun, and glowing with the stars, they see different degrees of glory. In the eclipses which darken them, and the last elemental strife which shall shake them from their orbits, they see the overthrow of thrones, and the extinction of all human splendor. In storms, and earthquakes, and the rush of mighty waters, they see the irresistible sweep of the Divine vengeance, chasing the proudest rebels like the sheep of the wilderness, and hurling down the loftiest marks of human power; while the dawning light, the calm which sits enthroned on earth after the tempest, the buoyant clouds flitting across the vernal sky, and dropping fatness on the earth, the spring bubbling forth in the desert, smiling vales and laughing fields, display to them, by images which at once enchant the imagination, and enlarge the heart, the refreshing, cheering blessings of Messiah’s feet and universal salvation. Christian poets have often well imitated them; and thus has the poet himself been raised above his natural level. But as for the poets of the world, what are all their associations of human passions, and merely human instincts and sentiments, with the imagery of nature, in comparison with these! There was the true inspiration: it opened to them all the mystic ties and chains of sacred association; it gave a hallowed voice to all nature; it erected the whole universe into a system of spiritual types, and made it a pattern of things in the heavens, and of heavenly things in human bosoms: it did more; for it dispersed the obscurity of the future, and, as though invested with the character of omniscience, made the things that were not as though they were.—*Rev. R. Watson.*

**Biblical Literature.**

**ON THE MORAL QUALIFICATIONS OF AN INTERPRETER OF SCRIPTURE.**

It has frequently been asserted, that in the interpretation of Scripture, we should proceed in the same manner that we would do in regard to any other book of antiquity. To a certain extent, this position may be regarded as just, and many of the observations contained in the following pages are founded on it; but as the Bible contains subjects, which, of all others, are calculated to affect the heart, and it is generally admitted, that in proportion as the heart is interested in any inquiry, a corresponding degree of influence will be exerted on the processes of investigation; it is evident, that respect must be had to the moral state of the affections, if we would arrive at just and accurate views of divine truth.

The high and exclusive claims of Scripture, too, give them an elevation of character, which commands peculiar attention and respect. Till the mind be satisfied on the subject of these claims, it may be conceded to an inquirer, to class the sacred writings with other works, pretending to a heavenly origin, though, even then, he could not be justified in treating their contents with levity and indifference of mind; but no sooner are their inspiration and paramount authority admitted, than, according to the natural constitution of the human mind, he is constrained to place himself under the influence of a principle, which will lead him to bow with humble submission to their holy dictates, and to seek in all things to receive and practice whatever is presented to him, as the will of the great Author of revelation.

If he be imbued with the spirit of the Bible, and his affections be in unison with its dictates, nothing will be more natural and easy, than the acquisition of correct

ideas respecting its contents: whereas, if his views, feelings, and inclinations are at variance with its requirements, he will infallibly, though perhaps unwittingly, endeavour to pervert the language in which these requirements are recorded, in order to bring them into accordance with his wishes, or the standard of his preconceived opinions.

1. The primary moral qualification, therefore, of all who would successfully interpret the Scriptures, is *vital and practical godliness*—that “godliness,” which “is profitable to all things”—“the fear of the Lord,” which “is the beginning of wisdom.” While it is the righteous determination of heaven, that “none of the wicked shall understand;” we are taught by Him, who is truth itself, that all who conduct their inquiries under the influence of a predisposition to conform to the will of God, shall not be left without instruction: John vii. 17. “What man is he that searcheth the Lord? him shall he teach in the way that he shall choose.” Psalm xxv. 12.

2. *Unreserved submission to the authority of divine revelation.* The language of him who interprets Scripture, should ever be in harmony with that of Samuel: “Speak, Lord, for thy servant hearoth.” All favorite ideas, popular hypotheses, hereditary or self-cogitated systems and opinions, must be laid prostrate at the feet of the Bible, which must be “received not as the word of men; but as it is in truth, the word of God.”—“To the law and the testimony,” all our decisions must be brought. If they differ from them, “it is because there is no light in them.” A divine revelation might naturally be expected to teach truths untaught by reason; and it is equally natural to expect, that our limited capacities should not be able to comprehend fully the modes, circumstances, and relations of those truths which reason could not teach, and which are known only by revelation, any more than of many physical and moral truths connected with our world, known without revelation.\*

3. *An humble and teachable disposition of mind.* As few things are more hostile to the pursuit of truth, in general, than self-conceit and pride of intellect, so there is no temper more offensive to the great Author of religious truth, than a proud and self-sufficient disposition. “Though the Lord be high, yet hath he respect to the lowly; but the proud he knoweth afar off. Every one that is proud in heart, is an abomination to the Lord. God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble. The meek will he guide in judgment, and the weak will he teach his way.” Psalm cxxxviii. 6; Prov. xvi. 5; 1 Peter v. 5; Psalm xxv. 9. Hence, both in the general defence of Christianity, and in the successful interpretation of its essential doctrines, none have more signally distinguished themselves than they who, to a grasp of intellect above their fellows, have united the profoundest reverence and humility in exploring the depths of heavenly wisdom.†

4. *A decided attachment to divine truth, springing from a perception of its intrinsic beauty and excellence.* That spirit of indifference which some would recommend as favourable to the discovery of truth, is perfectly incompatible with all just ideas of the nature and importance of divine revelation. The truths it discloses are so transcendently excellent, and bear so directly on our best and dearest interests, that whenever discovered in their native light, they must win the heart, and decide the choice. Accordingly, those who derive no saving benefit from the Gospel, are said to receive not the LOVE OF THE TRUTH. 2 Thess. ii. 10. The more the true glory of the revealed system is perceived, the more will the mind be imbued with its spirit, and the influence which this imbucment will exert in leading to full and consistent views of that system, cannot fail to be signally beneficial.

5. *Persevering diligence in the use of every proper means for discovering “the mind of the spirit.”* While it is of prime importance for the interpreter of Scripture to form a just estimate of his natural faculties, and never to attribute supremacy to his own understanding, or the judgment of any mere man, or body of men, it is obviously his duty to apply those faculties in the use of the various means with which he is furnished for understanding the Scriptures. Subject to those restrictions, which

a sense of the supreme authority of the oracles of God, and the natural darkness of the mind, cannot but inspire, human reason and science may, without hesitation, be allowed their full share in the interpretation of those oracles. Though incompetent in themselves to the discovery of spiritual knowledge, yet, when discovered, they are competent to discern, to examine, to compare, to illustrate, and to confirm it by means similar to those which, in every other pursuit, lead most certainly to improvement and perfection.\* Not only must the interpreter render himself familiar with the contents of the sacred volume, by a constant and unremitting reading; but he must spare no pains in finding out, and appropriating to his use, all the accessory means by which his acquaintance with it may be facilitated and advanced; endeavouring to make himself master of every subject in any way connected with the work in which he is engaged; and guarding against every temptation to precipitation and rashness, in drawing conclusions respecting subjects of such transcendent importance.

6. *Incessant and earnest prayer for divine illumination.* While it is freely admitted, that no such extraordinary teaching, as was enjoyed in the age of inspiration, can warrantably be expected in the present day, it is nevertheless undeniable, that the Scriptures instruct us to believe in the enlightening influences of the Holy Spirit. 1 John ii. 20, 27. This aid consists in a special, internal, and efficient operation of that divine agent, and is no less distinct from the prophetic and apostolic impulse, than it is from that mere natural assistance by which we discover common truths, and succeed in our ordinary undertakings. It is granted in answer to prayer, accompanied by the exercise of humble dependence on God, and a due use of all the ordinary means of improvement. “If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not: AND IT SHALL BE GIVEN HIM.” James i. 5.

All eminent interpreters of Scripture have asserted the necessity and utility of prayer. One of the qualifications which Wickliff considered to be indispensably requisite in him who interprets the word of God, he expresses in the following striking terms:—“He should be a MAN OF PRAYER. HE NEEDS THE INTERNAL INSTRUCTION OF THE PRIMARY TEACHER.”† To the same effect is the testimony of the great Dr. Owen:—“For a man solemnly to undertake the interpretation of any portion of Scripture without invocation of God, to be taught and instructed by his Spirit, is a high provocation of him; nor shall I expect the discovery of truth from any one who thus proudly engages in a work so much above his ability. But this is THE SHEET ANCHOR of a faithful expositor in all difficulties; nor can he without this be satisfied that he hath attained the mind of the Spirit in any divine revelation. When all other helps fail, as they frequently do, this will afford him the best relief. The labours of former expositors are of excellent use; but they are far from having discovered the depths of this vein of wisdom; nor will the best of our endeavours prescribe limits to our successors: and the reason why the generality go in the same track, except in some excursions of curiosity, is not giving themselves up to the conduct of the Holy Spirit in the diligent performance of their duty.”‡ And Ernesti himself, whom none will accuse of fanaticism, scruples not to assert, “that men truly pious, and desirous of knowing the truth, are assisted by the influence of the Spirit in their researches, especially in those things that pertain to faith and practice.” Part iii. chap. 1. § 19.

Had the subjects treated of in this chapter not been in a great measure systematically excluded from hermeneutical and exegetical studies, and in many instances regarded as detrimental to the free and successful prosecution of them, foreign theological literature would not have been disgraced as it is with such a mass of puerile, irreverent, and hazardous interpretations, such temerity of hypothesis, and such an immense accumulation of philological speculations, marshalled in infidel array against the fortress of divine truth. To guard the student against the pernicious consequences of attempting to interpret the Bible, except in the spirit of the Bible, the

above preliminary observations are inserted in this part of the work.—*Elements of Biblical Criticism and Interpretation.*

**Biography.**

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTICES OF THE REV. BARTHOLOMEW WESLEY, AND OF THE REV. JOHN WESLEY, HIS SON; GREAT-GRANDFATHER, AND GRANDFATHER, OF THE LATE REV. JOHN AND CHARLES WESLEY: BY THE REV. W. BEAL.

(Concluded.)

JOHN WESTLEY, M. A., VICAR OF WINTERBOURNE-WHITCUMCH, DORSET, 1658-1802.

John Westley, M. A., the son of Bartholomew Westley, was born about the year 1658. In those days, the children of truly pious parents received religious instruction with the same regularity that they received their daily food. Nothing was then thought worthy the name of education, which was not based on Christianity, and sanctified by the word of God and prayer. Should the reader inquire in what this consisted, he ought to be directed to the works of the Puritans and Nonconformists for information, and not to the reports of their enemies. Take, for example, the published lives of Philip and Matthew Henry. From these we learn that family religion formed an essential part of their discipline; and that they made it a matter of conscience to instruct their children and dependents in their social, moral, and religious duties. It was also their practice to set apart particular days for prayer and humiliation, in seasons of calamity; and for thanksgivings on the reception of special benefits. In those and subsequent times, the world has made them their scorn, as fanatics; but though derided as enthusiasts, and for the uncourtly severity of their manners, yet there are periods when those, by whom the Nonconformists have been reproached, would gladly say, “May I finally be found with these good men!” In this way it was the happiness of John Westley to be instructed, and from early life to be dedicated to the service of God. And it was the solace and joy of his parents, that in this duty they had not laboured in vain. It would be injustice equally to the parents and to the son, to withhold from the reader the fruits of his education, as they are brought down to us by the valued diligence and care of Dr. Calamy. “It pleased God to incline this Mr. John Westley to remember his Creator in the days of his youth, and lay him under serious impressions in his tender years. He had a very humbling sense of sin, and a serious concern for his salvation, even while he was a school-boy. He began to keep a diary soon after God had begun to work upon him; and not only recorded the remarkable steps and turns of Providence that affected his outward man, but especially all the methods of the Spirit of grace in his dealings with his soul: what was the frame of his heart in his attendance on the several ordinances of the Gospel; how he found himself affected under the various methods of divine Providence, whether merciful or afflictive. And this course he continued with little interruption to the end of his life.” How great the worth of this journal, if it could now be found!

At the proper age, John Westley was sent to Oxford, and became a student at New-lan Hall, that to the service of the sanctuary he might be presented in the best state of preparation. At this period, events had led to important changes in the religious establishment of the country. By “the Et Calera Oath,” and other strong measures, it was thought this might be preserved. These, however, not only defeated their own purpose, but, by re-action, led to the “solemn League and Covenant,” “the Negative Oath,” “the agreement of the people,” and the Puritans to power. Episcopacy gave place to the Presbytery; and the Liturgy to the Directory; the modes of worship were different, and new persons were borne on to authority; but the old spirit too much prevailed. The divine right of Episcopacy had passed to the divine right of the Presbytery; and the clergy who changed not with the times, and who could not conscientiously submit to rapid legislation, were exposed to much suffering. The ascendant clergy, “in rejecting the old regimen, were concerned that a *secular Prelacy* should not be substituted in the room of the ecclesiastical. The Commons, on the other hand, were equally vigilant to prevent any spiritual authority to succeed

\* See the Elements of Biblical Theology, vol. i. p. 67. † See the Elements of Biblical Theology, vol. i. p. 67. ‡ See the Elements of Biblical Theology, vol. i. p. 67.