

The Christian.

ST. JOHN, N. B., JULY, 1896

EDITORIAL.

Instead of the usual editorial we give the peroration of the "Preface to the narratives of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John," which may be new to many of our readers who have not seen these excellent notes in "The Living Oracles."

Now as the design of a writer is his own guide in the selection and arrangement of his materials, arguments and evidences, so it is the only infallible guide when known to the interpretation of what he has written. A regard to the grand design of the whole, and to the particular design of each item in the narrative, will do more to explain to us the meaning of what is written than all comments upon the meaning of words, or what is called "the doctrines" of scriptures.

Were a person to write at a great distance from Judea, as John did, where the people knew little or nothing of the Jewish prophets or of the Jewish customs, he would not think of troubling them with a roll of lineage about his pedigree, nor with many quotations from ancient prophets, except to let them know that he had been the subject of ancient prophecy, and mention a few instances to show that these prophecies had been most exactly fulfilled in him. He would introduce John the Harbinger merely as a "man sent from God." If he spoke of the people of Canaan he would simply call them Jews. If he introduced any Hebrew names, such as Rabbi or Messiah, he would interpret them. If any of the sacred institutions of the Jew's religion, such as the passover, was introduced, he would call it a feast of the Jews. If he referred to any of the usual customs of the Jews he would explain them, such as the Jewish manner of purifying. If he spoke of places in that country he would give a geographical description of them, such as Bethany, upon the Jordan. If he alluded to the sectarian feelings of this people, he would describe to what extent they were carried by informing his readers that the Jews had no intercourse with the Samaritans. Nay, he would adopt the style of the east as far as compatible with a lucid statement of facts, and as light was a favorite topic of the Asiatics, he would under this similitude introduce to their consideration Jesus as "the light of the world." In affording them the evidence of the mission of this wonderful personage, knowing that they would argue from the reception which Jesus met with at home in his own country, he would be particular in narrating the miracles wrought in and near to the metropolis; and the different arguments and debates to which they gave rise, and as they would have been more likely to have heard his fame from the people that visited Jerusalem at the great annual festivals and convocations, he would more minutely detail what happened on those

occasions. Such would be some of his peculiarities in addressing a people so great strangers to Jewish history.

With similar varieties both Luke and Mark are distinguished, but for the same reasons, and subordinate to the same ends, and are just as easily understood as those of Matthew and John, when all the preceding considerations are attended to.

The Christian who sincerely desiring to understand these narratives, will not only most unfeignedly present his supplications and prayers to him who gives his Holy Spirit to them that ask him, but he will exercise those faculties of understanding which God has given him and to which he has adapted all his communications since man became a transgressor. He will apply the same rules of interpretation to these compositions which he would apply to any other writings of the same antiquity. He will consider the terms not otherwise explained by the writers as conveying the same ideas which they are wont to convey in common acceptation. He will always keep the design of the writer before his mind, and for this purpose he will attend all circumstances requisite to ascertaining his design—such as the character of the writer himself, the circumstances of the people whom he addressed or amongst whom he published his writings, their peculiar prejudices, views and feelings, at the time of his writing to or for them; his own most explicit avowals with regard to his motives and intention in making any communications to them. All these things will be attended to and the writings examined in the natural order in which they are presented; noting every illusion and incident with the greatest circumspection whether in regard to time, place or character. But above all the most prominent object which the writer has in view will be the most prominent in the consideration of a rational reader of his writings. And when difficulties occur, not to be satisfactorily solved by the mere import of the words, that meaning which best accords with the design of the whole writing or with the particular passages will be preferred.

But as yet we have not called the attention of the reader to the ultimate design of these narratives. We have indeed noticed that their immediate design is to convince the reader that Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah the Son of God—and this object is subordinate to another design, viz. *That the reader might through this conviction enjoy everlasting life.*

Reader! this is the glorious end of all these sacred histories. On the following pages is inscribed the most astonishing narrative ever read; the sublimest and simplest story ever told. But this is not all. It is designed to accomplish an object superlatively grand—transcending in degrees inexpressible—the most magnificent scheme that created intelligence ever conceived to convert a race of polluted, miserable and dying mortals into pure, happy and glorious immortals; to convert the gates of death into the gates of

immortality to make the pathway to rottenness and corruption a high road to deathless rigor and incorruptible glory; to make the grave the vestibule, the antechamber, to a house not made with hands eternal in the heavens; to make the dying groans of sin-worn nature a prelude to ecstasies unalloyed. Yes this is the benevolent and glorious design of these testimonies. Books written with such a design, with a design to purify, elevate and glorify the debased and degraded children of men; to prepare, furnish and adorn these for the society of principalities and powers, for the society of their God and King in a world of perfect bliss; most assuredly come with a divine character to man. Their claims to the attention and examination of those to whom they are presented most certainly are paramount to all others. And the bare hypothesis, to say nothing of the moral certainty, that they come from God with such a design is quite enough methinks to woo our whole rational nature, to constrain all our moral powers, to test their high pretending to a character so philanthropic and divine.

On such a theme who would not wish to be eloquent? But how can we equal in style a subject which, when but faintly and in prospective viewed, exhausted the sublimest strains of heaven-taught prophets, and of poets fired with God's own inspiration, whose hallowed lips tasted not the fabled springs of Pagan muses, but the fountain of living waters springing from eternal love? Yet even these failed to hush its praise. Nay, the brightest seraph that burns in heavenly light fails in his best effort and in profound thought pores upon the marvelous theme. The compassion of the eternal God, the benevolence and philanthropy of the Father of the whole Family, in heaven and in earth, towards us the fallen children of his love, has transcended the loftiest grasp of the highest intelligence, and has made to falter the most expressive tongue in all the ranks of heavenly powers. In all the rapturous flights of these morning stars of creation, in all the ecstatic acclamations of these elder sons of God, the theme has not been reached, and though they have tuned their harps a thousand times, and swelled their voices in full chorus in countless efforts, yet the theme is still unequalled, and, as it were, untouched. Vain, then, would be the attempt, and fruitless every effort, to express, in corresponding terms, a subject so divine. Indeed, we have no language, we have not been taught an alphabet adapted to such a theme.

"Come, then, expressive silence, muse its praise."

It is claimed that there are twenty million widows in India, most of whom are under twelve years of age, and who by custom are cast out, despised, and not allowed to marry again. What a sanction is in this for woman's foreign missionary societies, particularly in view of the fact that only women can approach these poor social waifs.

Our disappointments on the road to heaven whet our appetites for the better country and quicken the pace of our pilgrimage to the celestial city.