

disturbed but slightly in four verses, while in the usual order it is not disturbed, while Matthew and Mark both are less disturbed in this more chronological order of the narratives. In any case it may be said there is no dislocation worthy of special notice, or that is in the least against the chronological character of any of the narratives.

[*To be Continued.*]

ARTICLE VI.

USES AND ABUSES OF AN IMPORTANT PRINCIPLE OF INTERPRETATION.

It is an obvious principle of interpretation, that the known nature of the subject under consideration must inevitably modify the significance of the words used. The different shades of meaning conveyed by the word "bring" afford a familiar illustration. If a teacher asks a pupil to bring the book to him, the pupil takes it up by main force and transports it. If the judge commands the sheriff to bring the prisoner, it is not expected that the sheriff will take the prisoner up in his hands as the pupil did the book, but that he will simply make use of those motives of fear which ordinarily compel the prisoner to come into the presence of the judge. If the mother says to her son, "Bring your friend home with you to dinner," the word suggests neither force nor intimidation, as in the other two cases. Thus, in this simple instance, is illustrated the subtle capabilities of language, and the fact that the known nature

of the subject under consideration is an essential factor in determining the meaning of the words employed.

Under the influence of this principle the man of ordinary sense and candor has no difficulty in properly understanding the anthropomorphic language necessarily used when speaking of the attributes and actions of God. If we are to speak of God at all, we must speak of him "after the manner of men." When the sacred writer says, that God has repented of having made man, the very nature of the case implies that he uses the language in such a modified sense as does not ascribe to God the fallibility and vacillation of an imperfect and sinful being.

When we pray that God will not lead us into temptation, our absolute confidence in the goodness of the Creator precludes us from implying that there is any danger that God will, from malice, plot our downfall as wicked men do. The petition can have reference only to those trials of character which may be incidental to a wisely planned moral system, and from which relief may be had beforehand, upon condition of cherishing the spirit of humble dependence which expresses itself in prayer.

Another legitimate and obvious application of this principle relates to the use of language which involves assumptions both of God's foreknowledge and of man's freedom. Such language, on the face of it, often seems to imply that God exercises arbitrary and absolute authority over the human will. But the ordinary common-sense of men precludes such an interpretation of the language, because all men have, at the bottom of their hearts, unwavering confidence in the wisdom and goodness of the Creator, and are, at the same time, equally sure of the freedom of their wills. When, therefore, God is said to have hardened Pharaoh's heart, it does not require the learning of an exegete to prove that God is not thereby charged with acting in an arbitrary manner, or that Pharaoh is not represented as the victim of necessity.

One does not have to reflect long on the constitution of his own nature to see that the adjustments between the freedom of man's will and the omnipotence of God, are too delicate and profound to be accurately expressed in simple words drawn, as all words are, from the realm of nature's absolute continuity. Pharaoh's heart was not hardened by God as steel is hardened by the blacksmith. Any one who has had any moral experience at all has had enough to make this distinction. And so, as a matter of fact, readers of ordinary candor have very little difficulty in properly understanding this language concerning Pharaoh, and feel no incongruity when, on the other hand, Pharaoh is said to have hardened his own heart.

In the preceding instances the knowledge of the subject is that derived directly from experience or from the intuitions of the mind. But there are other sources of information which may legitimately lead to the same result, and are duly recognized in the ordinary canons of interpretation. For example, it is an important rule that a single passage in a literary document should be considered *contextually*, and that the general scope of the author's writings must be duly regarded before final decision is rendered as to its meaning. Now, study of the context is only another way of increasing our information concerning the nature of the subject under discussion, for the purpose of being able to make proper allowance for the subtle influences of this knowledge upon the writer's language. The same principle is sometimes expressed in another form, namely, that we should interpret a man's words by all that he has said upon the subject, and should aim so to construe his language that it shall be consistent with itself. Often this is an impossibility, since men do not have complete comprehension of any subject, and what they say at one time may actually contradict what they say at another time. Hence it may be that a document may defy all attempts to show its consistency; yet, in construing important papers which have been prepared

by men of ordinary ability, it is always a laudable aim to try to find an interpretation that shall be consistent throughout.

Upon this last line of thought depends the important principle, that we are to interpret the Bible according to the *analogy of faith*,—a principle worthy of more consideration than it is apt to receive at the present time. In many quarters there is a most unreasonable fear lest there shall be given to individual texts of Scripture a fulness of meaning that is not in the words as they stand by themselves. This fear is often carried to absurd extremes of literalism. A striking illustration of the injustice of this kind of procedure is to be found in the recent attempts of the Andover Professors and Trustees to prove that the creed of their Seminary does not deny the doctrine of future probation. Because, forsooth, the clause upon that point simply reads, "But the wicked will awake to shame and everlasting contempt," these special pleaders say they are at liberty to hold that the awaking spoken of, is not that to consciousness immediately after death, but is the awaking at the last day of judgment. Now, to say nothing of the fact that if the wicked are to sleep till the day of judgment there can be no opportunity meanwhile for them to hear of the historic Christ, there is the broader fact that the clause above quoted does not stand alone, but is in a document of no equivocal meaning. Not to speak of historical sources of information, we know, from other portions of the creed, something about the subject treated of in this clause. For example, the preceding article has clearly shut off the doctrine of purgatory, as held in the Romish Church, by the unequivocal clause, "The souls of believers are *at their death* made perfect in holiness, and do immediately pass into glory;" whereupon, connected with it by the adversative conjunction "but," there follows the clause just quoted concerning the wicked. The grammatical construction, therefore, would naturally carry over the qualifying

phrase "at their death" to the second clause. But, as that is a grammatical point, we pass it by; for there are other ways of finding out the meaning of this single clause. The words under consideration are in the Twenty-sixth Article. In the Twenty-fourth Article the writers had clearly defined their position on this very point. Having already affirmed that we are made partakers of redemption by the renewing agency of the Holy Spirit, they there explicitly say, "That those who are effectually called, do *in this life* partake of justification, adoption, and sanctification," etc. In presence of these facts the ordinary mind finds it difficult to frame language which shall properly characterize such an attempt as the Professors have made to evacuate the clause of its meaning; for, if the grammar does not carry over the limiting phrase "at their death" from the Twenty-fifth into the Twenty-sixth Article, the known nature of the subject treated of, as shown by the body of the document, most certainly does; and for the Professors and Trustees to attempt to prove otherwise is to bring into contempt, and to surround with an air of insincerity, the whole business of interpretation in which we are all engaged, and for the perfection of which theological seminaries were established.

So, in interpreting particular texts of Scripture, we are not at liberty to limit the meaning of each clause to the bare letter in its isolated position. Each single passage of Scripture is part of an organic whole, and to interpret according to the analogy of faith, is not only perfectly legitimate, but is an imperative duty, and is directly in the line of all scientific progress. When a palæontologist finds a single bone or leaf in the geological strata, he brings to bear upon it all his knowledge of comparative anatomy and botany, and mentally reconstructs the organism according to that knowledge. It would be a ridiculous procedure for him to do otherwise, and to attempt to treat the fragment as a thing by itself;

for such things are not by themselves, they are parts of a consistent whole. So the Bible is pervaded by a *system* of truth, and one part is joined to all the other parts. This is shown in all general works on the evidences of Christianity. We are not, therefore, in our interpretation of Scripture, at liberty to ignore this vital connection of one part with another. Every portion of Scripture throbs with life. We cannot wrest from the Bible anywhere our pound of flesh without drawing blood also, and, like Shylock, becoming responsible for consequential damages. The clear and unequivocal teachings of Christ, and the doctrines as more fully unfolded by the apostles, are most properly used to interpret the sayings that are hard to be understood; for by divine power their spirit is made to course as life-blood through the whole Scripture. Of all parts of the Jewish Scripture, Christ has said, "They are they which testify of me."

Like all true and good things, however, the important principle under consideration is peculiarly liable to perversion. Its abuse is at the foundation of nearly every system of heterodoxy, especially such as depend upon some peculiar method of justifying the ways of God with men. The danger in applying the principle manifestly is, that we shall overestimate the amount of our original and acquired knowledge concerning the subjects under consideration. We are especially liable to this mistake when so vast a theme as the constitution of the moral universe is in question. To some, however, it seems no presumptuous thing for them to suggest wholesale improvements which might have been made in the original construction of the system. So confident, indeed, are some of the sufficiency of their knowledge on all subjects, that they are ready to suggest, off-hand, various improvements that might have been made in nature herself, had they been called into the council of the Almighty at the beginning; while a larger number are more than ready to suggest improvements in the moral system as

revealed in the Bible. A popular infidel recently announced, that, if he had created the world, he would have made good health catching and sickness impossible. And so, in the whole range of dark things, it would seem a very simple matter to rid the world of evils by some such scheme of absolute prohibition. But, on profounder reflection, it is seen that the problem of how much evil it is best to permit and provide for in the universe is too complex a question to admit of easy solution. The moral good of the race would seem to be possible only with a certain amount of hazard, and the permission of a certain amount of evil. If moral action is allowed at all to men, there must be some possible experience of evil for them to perceive and act upon. No perception of moral responsibility can arise where there is no harm that can be done.

A fundamental fault with all systems of theodicy which involve universal salvation or future probation as essential elements, is that they assume on man's part a knowledge of the necessities of the divine government which is not only beyond human attainment, but which does not properly consider the plain facts of nature which are before the eyes of all. We are not at liberty to forget that nature is a work of God, and that providence is one form of his activity. The permission of evil in these portions of his system, raises questions as unanswerable as any that are raised by the orthodox doctrines concerning eternal punishment and the close of human probation with this life. Those who say, as some have said recently, that the ways of God cannot be justified without admitting the theory of a probation after death for those who have not had the historic Christ preached to them in this life, presume upon an amount of knowledge which will not be readily granted them. In giving their interpretation to such obscure passages as that concerning the preaching of Christ to the spirits in prison, they are assuming to assign a degree of authority to their own

speculations concerning the nature of things that rightfully belongs only to the general teaching of the Scripture upon the subject. The majority of sober-minded believers must be pardoned if they prefer to interpret such passages in accordance with the general teaching of Scripture, rather than after the surmised improvements which some think would have been made in the system if they had been taken into counsel at an earlier date ; or, at any rate, if they had been consulted beforehand about the revelation.

The same line of remark is proper respecting much of the biblical criticism which is now beginning to circulate through popular channels in this country. This is characterized by an inordinate fear of admitting the supernatural element in biblical history, except where there is no possibility of excluding it. It is characteristic of this whole class of critics to assume the possession of an amount of knowledge regarding the subjects treated of that will not readily be conceded to them. Those who are writing now most freely to prove the late origin of the Pentateuch, for example, are depending for success in their argument on the acceptance of their general views concerning historical development. They say that there is necessarily a *slow* development of ideas in the history of any people. In this, however, they seem to most of us to assume a knowledge of human nature that has no good foundation. The progress of history all along seems to have been marked by the appearance of heroes and epoch-making men who have set all things moving in definite directions. To attempt to belittle the influence of such a character as Moses confessedly is, and to account for the Pentateuch by evolution, may seem to these critics scientific, but they must not be surprised if men in general disagree with them. Such books as Leviticus and Numbers do not seem, at least to minds constructed after the ordinary pattern, like the products of historical evolution. It is hard to make it appear probable that such peculiar

books should have either sprung up or have survived in any natural way.

The question between the critics who would exorcise Moses from the Pentateuch and those who hold the ordinary view, is not by any means wholly one of minute scholarship, but largely one of common-sense. The determining facts are mostly on the surface, accessible to ordinary readers. For example, in the case of the teraphim which Michal put in the bed when David escaped from Saul, it is said that this shows that David had no objections to idols, but probably felt the need of them, and used them to help his devotions, and so the Second Commandment could not have been then in force. In this, however, these critics presume to know things which others cannot well believe to be possible. Can it be that these critics have read the Psalms of David, and yet believe that, with all his high conceptions of the spirituality of God, this man after God's own heart should have depended upon an idol to quicken his devotional exercises? To the ordinary reader it seems that such a supposition does violence to common-sense; and the ordinary reader is right; for it does so. It is far more reasonable to suppose that this teraphim, if it was an idol, was surreptitiously kept in the house by the degenerate daughter of Saul, than that the writer of the Psalms which can properly be accredited to David, should have no serious objection to the use of idols in his private devotions.

But they say that David did not write any Psalms; and, while professing great reverence for the character of Christ, they at the same time produce labored arguments to prove that there is no evidence that David wrote the one hundred and tenth Psalm, even though our Lord expressly attributes it to him, and affirms that David was *in the Spirit* when uttering it,—all which is done on the ground that this Psalm contains a prophetic conception which David could not have had, and that in the face of the fact that Christ expressly says that David did have it.

Thus easily they would rule out the supernatural from the Old Testament. On the other hand, we affirm, without fear of successful contradiction, that if Christianity be accepted at all, the supernatural element in the central doctrine of Christ's incarnation and resurrection is such as to make the ordinary interpretation of the Old Testament prophecies most natural and reasonable; and that the remarks getting to be current about the total lack of scientific exegesis in the time of Christ and the apostles are either a use of words without knowledge, or something worse. The ordinary interpretation of the Bible is consistent, and the supernatural element in the Old Testament matches that in the New, and we have a congruous whole.

The principle we are discussing has also, an important and helpful application in all matters pertaining to the reconciliation of the Bible with modern science. It has sometimes been urged, to the discredit of biblical exegesis, that it affects to adjust the first chapter of Genesis to every new scientific discovery, and thereby shows that there is no definite meaning to language in the chapter. This charge, however, instead of being to the discredit of the interpreters, speaks volumes respecting the consummate skill displayed in the literary composition of the chapter. It is not a general characteristic of human cosmogonies that they are thought to be adjustable to scientific systems of the present day. If one tries to adjust the scientific references of the Koran, or of the Vedas, to modern discoveries, he will at once see the difference between such a task and that of harmonizing the Bible of the Hebrews with the same body of discoveries. The consummate skill, or why should we not rather say the supernatural prevision, with which the first chapter of Genesis is written, appears more and more surprising as time advances, and as it is brought into closer comparison with the well-credited theories of modern science. The language of Genesis seems to have been chosen with a

complete foresight of the tests to which it was to be subjected. The writer has in the main limited himself to general terms which are easily adjustable. When it is said that God created the heavens and the earth, and that afterwards he made various things in particular, the mode of creation is not determined. Whether the process was long or short, cannot be learned from the words used, unless the use of the word "day" in further describing the process is to be pressed in strict literalness.

But, with the general reputation which the Bible has obtained for supernatural foresight, we are not unprepared to find that this word "day" is easily capable of all the adjustment which will be necessary as discoveries come in from the field of science. And so do we find it. It is a word which, in actual use in other places in the Bible and in fact in the whole range of literature, is subject to just the class of modifications in meaning that are necessary in the first chapter of Genesis to keep it in line with modern progress. In fact, it is a word which the known nature of the subject in hand can easily modify without doing violence to the genius of the language.

This brief survey of the subject is sufficient to show that the outcry against what may be called the *synthetic* mode of interpretation is largely a mistake. It arises in most cases, we doubt not, from lack of logical training on the part of many of the exegetes, and from lack of familiarity with the processes so fruitful in modern inductive science, and which have, on the whole, been so well applied by the great theologians of the past, to the interpretation of the Bible. For example, in the controversy now going on with reference to the date and authorship of the Pentateuch, it is claimed that even Christ expressed no opinion on the question. This position is arrived at by the processes already referred to of analyzing the passages, and then making every statement stand by itself, and thus shutting off all possibility of cumulative argument. When, for example, we read that our Lord said to

the Jews,' "Did not Moses *give* you the law?" and again, in the same connection, "Moses therefore gave unto you circumcision," (that is, as the context shows *the law* of circumcision) this is not permitted to mean that Moses gave the law in writing, because the particular word used is not the specific word for writing. It is, however, a generic word for writing. And to the most of us writing seems the most natural way for a lawgiver to promulgate his laws, and especially for a man versed, as Moses was, in all the learning of Egypt.

One of the learned representatives of this mode of criticism recently laid down a very strict rule upon the subject, and insisted that nothing should be admitted in the argument but explicit statements of our Lord, contending that, where Christ did not say "write," he did not mean write. Whereupon this learned teacher defied the world to show a single passage where Christ had said that Moses wrote a single verse of the Pentateuch, italicizing this challenge. It is one of the most instructive illustrations on record of the limitation of human knowledge, that this challenge was made by a professor of New Testament exegesis, all ignorant of the fact that Christ, two chapters before, had used the following emphatic language: "If ye believed Moses ye would believe me, for he *wrote* of me. But if ye believe not his *writings*, how shall ye believe my words?" This certainly is a case where more knowledge concerning the subject was necessary for the interpretation of the whole class of passages under consideration. The phenomenal neglect of the learned teacher (who, by the way, was writing specially for the edification and instruction of the large numbers who are now making a specialty of the study of the English Bible)—the phenomenal neglect, we repeat, of the learned writer in this case to inform himself concerning even the existence of the clearest and most central passage of Scripture relating to his subject,

¹ John vii. 19, 22.

² John v. 46, 47.

and one which seems to furnish the key to the whole situation, is somewhat characteristic of the class of critics in which he places himself; for so far as we have observed, this class of interpreters is much given to tithing mint, anise, and cummin, while neglecting the weightier matters of the law.

Indeed, so fearful are they of being biassed in their judgment, that they would seem often to prefer, with Sydney Smith, to review a book before reading it, lest they should become prejudiced in its favor. It would almost seem as if they were trying to elevate to a canonical position the very opposite principle to that upon which we are commenting. Instead of seeing what changes in the shade of interpretation *larger* knowledge of the subject would induce, these critics appear to have a violent antipathy against seeking for knowledge at the surest fountains of truth, lest it shall circumscribe their field of speculation. Let us free our minds from pre-conceptions, they say, that we may ascertain just what this passage means by itself. One of their most moderate leaders³ in Germany recently wrote thus with regard to the evidence concerning the authorship of the Pentateuch: "As regards the passages from the New Testament, we must protest against their use, for the twofold reason, that, if they prove the Mosaic authorship, all other proofs are superfluous, and are a derogation from the authority of our Lord; and the use of such proofs removes the whole question from the historical and critical domain. We therefore do not regard the external proofs as binding." A great hardship, truly! But we do not just see how they can honorably be relieved from it. Whatever may be the case with these critics, the majority of believers will always find it difficult to set the testimony of Christ and the apostles down as utterly unhistorical. It may however be a comfort to these critics to be reminded

³ Hermann L. Strack in the Schaff-Herzog Encyclopaedia, art. "Pentateuch," p. 1791.

that the hardships imposed upon them, through the limitation of their field by external testimony respecting the relation of Moses to the Pentateuch, and the authorship of certain Psalms, are no greater than the men of natural science are daily subjected to without being provoked to complaint. In holding the critics to a fair consideration of the unequivocal testimony accessible, the public is only doing what has to be done with every class of speculators. No affliction will thus befall the critics of the Pentateuch but such as is common to men. If they follow their calling, not for criticism's sake, but for truth's sake, the Lord will surely provide them a way of escape and give them plenty to do. The legitimate field of investigation is large and inviting. But many things are already so well settled in science that the field of speculation is in certain directions much contracted.

When the men of science are busying themselves with speculation as to what is possible and probable, it is not unusual for some one to come in with an experiment and, by some fortunate discovery, cut off further speculation. While, for example they were speculating as to whether it was possible for a steamboat to cross the Atlantic, a steamer actually crossed, and put to an end all their fine-spun theories. The philosophers who still refuse to believe that the earth has been circumnavigated, because the acceptance of that fact would spoil their field of speculation (and there are still a few such in England) are not now in high repute, though for a season, when only one navigator had performed that prodigy of daring, they could muster a larger part of the learning of the continent. The whole procedure reminds us of the Canadian pastor into whose church the refugees across the border flocked, who was urged to make no reference in his remarks to embezzlement lest it should throw a coldness over his meetings. It would seem that in thus rudely setting aside the New Testament witness to the Old, the critics were refusing to

come to the light lest their deeds should be reproved. The devotees of natural science are held to a different rule. Woe to the man of science who pushes on in disregard of *any* light, especially light from the best source of information. The first thing a man of science feels called upon to do, is to learn the present state of information upon the subject he is about to investigate. And this is as it should be. This is what the public expects of every teacher. He has no right to despise the testimony because it is so plain that the common people can understand it, and so clear that it is above dispute.

But, some will ask, Is discussion of this whole class of questions to be foreclosed? Are we not free to inquire if Moses wrote the Pentateuch? and whether David wrote the one hundred and tenth Psalm? Certainly the questions are open. But you must explain away existing positive historical testimony before your circumstantial evidence will carry conviction. It is not good generalship to venture far into the enemy's country until you have taken his strong fortress and silenced its batteries. A few sounding words about the worthlessness of tradition is not enough to utterly discredit it, when that tradition has been directly endorsed by Christ and the apostles. Neither the Christian public at large nor the great body of sound scholars, are likely to suffer the destructive critics, who are coming to the front at the present time in this country, to monopolize, as they would seemingly be glad to do, all the prerogatives of biblical interpretation. They must establish their claims by better and broader work than they have yet done, before they will be permitted, without challenge, to revolutionize the prevailing belief as to the authorship of the Pentateuch, and to restate for the church the whole system of theology.

Of a piece with the foregoing was the statement made, a few years ago, by another doctor in a prominent theological seminary (who sits verily in the seat of Moses), to

the effect that the word "Scripture" was not applied to the New Testament writings until about the last of the second century. And so we were left to infer that the Second Epistle of Peter, since in it Paul's writings are classed with other Scripture, could not have been written before that time, and hence is a forgery; or, as some prefer to call it, "pseudonymous." Here was a case where the supposed known nature of the subject is made not only to give a shade of meaning to a single word, but to help brand as spurious a whole book that has generally been recognized as a part of the Bible. Even this would be proper enough were it certain that the professor knew as much about the subject as his statement assumes. Before accepting his dictum, however, the cautious student is impelled to ask, How does the professor know that the word had never been applied to the New Testament until A. D. 170, in the time of Theophilus of Antioch? What is the warrant for such a sweeping assertion? On investigation he finds, to his surprise, that there is no warrant for it. The professor did not know it, but only thought he knew it, because he had not happened to run across the passage in Barnabas where the corresponding clause "it is written" is used; and because he did not believe, to begin with, in the canonicity of Second Peter; and because he assumed that all the important literature of the early part of the second century had been preserved. Not long ago we heard a novice in biblical criticism who had been reading up in one of the works of the class of critics whose habits we are characterising, try to prove a universal negative by appealing to Papias. Quoting the words of his guide, he said triumphantly that the subject was not once referred to in the "*entire works* of Papias." We asked him how large a space he supposed the "*entire works of Papias*" occupied; and found that he had received the impression that the extant works of Papias were somewhat voluminous. He was perfectly surprised to learn that all there is left of the writings of that weak

Father are two or three pages of extracts saved from the ruthless ravages of the "tooth of time" by the scrupulous fidelity of Eusebius.

This brief survey can but impress the reader with the serious results legitimately following the work of our modern destructive critics. It is a matter of no small importance that they so continually depreciate the value of that interpretation of the Old Testament which is given by the writers of the New. It is no small matter that in determining disputed points, they set up the doubtful inferences of obscure circumstantial evidence as on a par with the historical traditions of the Jewish nation, witnessed to as they are by such peculiar historical institutions and by such continuity of literary documents, and all so clearly confirmed by the express words of our Lord himself. The dogmatism of denial is as likely to be worthy of deprecation as is the dogmatism of belief, and can be made upon a much more slender basis of scholarly attainments. Synthesis is equally essential with analysis. It is as important to strengthen faith by walking about Zion and marking well her bulwarks, as it is to raise false alarm and spread dismay in the minds of the ill-informed by prophetic forebodings of what may, perchance, come from some quarter of the heavens and overwhelm us. The person who cannot have any firm belief in anything for fear that some future discovery in science or interpretation may discredit it, cannot succeed in the spiritual warfare which is before him. The known nature of Christianity as a supernatural religion resting upon the miracles of the incarnation and of the resurrection as its corner-stones, gives fulness of meaning to every portion of Sacred Scriptur , and imparts its own virtue to every incident of preparatory history which touches it.