THE ELEMENTS OF

BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION:

OR

AN EXPOSITION

OF THE LAWS BY WHICH THE SCRIPTURES ARE CAPABLE OF BEING CORRECTLY INTERPRETED;

TOGETHER WITH AN ANALYSIS OF THE

RATIONALISTIC AND MYSTIC MODES

OF INTERPRETING THEM.

ADAPTED TO COMMON USE, AND DESIGNED AS AN AUXILIARY TO THE CRITICAL STUDY OF THE BIBLE.

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"Whoso readeth let him understand."—Jesus Christ.

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BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION.

CHAPTER I.

PRELIMINARY ESSAYS.

Sec. 1. Introductory and general remarks.

1. Ignorance of the principles and rules of Interpretation, is one of the greatest obstacles in the way of obtaining a correct knowledge of the Bible. Language is a medium of communication between man and his fellow man. Through this medium the thoughts, desires and determinations of one mind are made known to another. God has made communications of truth to the world, both by the natural objects of perception, and by the instrumentality of human language. He did not form a new language to be the medium of communication between himself and his creatures, but made use of that already formed and in use by them. Neither did he construct this language anew to make it answer his purpose; he took it just as it was, and used it just as he found it, for the benevolent purpose of instructing his creatures in the way of life and salvation. In the earlier ages of the world he found the Hebrew in use, and he then made his communications in that. In later times, the Hebrew being less generally understood, and the

Greek more generally known, he made his communications in Greek. Having made his communications once, he leaves them to be studied and interpreted by his subjects; to be studied in the same manner in which we study other writings, and to be interpreted by the same rules.

Those who are not acquainted with the original languages, may still have the benefit of this blessed volume translated into their vernacular tongues, by learned and pious men. Translations are made into almost all modern languages, which are extensively used, and many of them are made with the greatest possible care, and by men equally distinguished for their learning and piety. Our common translation was not only made with the greatest care, by men of distinguished learning and piety; but it has received the approbation of a long list of worthies of all orthodox denominations of Christians.

2. But in whatever method divine truth is approached, and by whatever medium it is brought within our reach, we ought to be mainly anxious to drink of its healing waters. Whether we read the Sacred Scriptures in their original or in our own vernacular tongue, we ought to be careful to understand them aright.

The truths of the Bible can do us good only as far as we understand and apply them. Just as far as we misunderstand the Bible, and mistake its meaning, we lose the benefits which it is designed to convey, and subject ourselves to the evils it was intended to correct.

While a right understanding of the Bible is ad-

mitted by all candid and intelligent students of it, to be of incalculable benefit and of inestimable value; and while so many loose, erroneous, and contradictory views are entertained on the subject of its communications, it is truly surprising that the theory of Biblical Interpretation has not been more generally a subject of investigation and inquiry.

Other branches of knowledge have received at least a share of public attention; this has by the multitude been almost entirely overlooked and neglected. Indeed it is hardly known by many a fierce religious disputant and wrangler in our land, that there is any such science as that of Biblical Interpretation.

But though neglected by the common people, believers and unbelievers, the most accurate Biblical scholars have devoted to it a large share of their attention. In the seats of learning, and by the most successful cultivators of Biblical knowledge, it has been studied with constantly increasing interest and benefit, both to themselves and the world with whom they communicate.

Lectures and other scientific instructions are given on this subject in our best Theological Seminaries, and the ablest expounders of God's word are devoting themselves to this study with singular assiduity and zeal.

3. A concise and elementary treatise on the subject of Biblical Interpretation, briefly explaining its fundamental principles and rules, and presenting them to view in their mutual relations and dependencies, has long been needed. This need has been felt and expressed, by at least a respectable portion

of the Christian public. There is nothing of the kind in circulation at present in this country. Prof. Stuart's translation of Ernesti, is not of a popular character, and is not adapted to interest and instruct the general reader, though deeply interesting to the accurate Classical and Biblical scholar.

4. In the present elementary treatise an endeavor has been made to exhibit the fundamental principles and rules of Biblical Interpretation, in such a manner, as to place them within the reach and comprehension of every intelligent reader of the English language. These rules are accompanied with such illustrations and examples, as will sufficiently evince their truth and show their application. The system of Interpretation exhibited in the following pages, is substantially the same as that of Ernesti. Technical expressions however are generally avoided, as being not adapted to instruct the great body of the Christian community for whose benefit this manual is more particularly designed.

5. In applying the following rules of Interpretation to the Bible, it is to be remembered, that the holy word of God is to be approached with the profoundest reverence. Rash and hasty judgments are not for a moment to be tolerated in relation to those vitally important subjects, which the Bible unfolds to our view. Here, if any where, when examining this blessed book if ever, we are to proceed with deliberation, and judge with candor and caution. How much is lost by a neglect to do this, no tongue can tell, and no pen describe. Much of the error in faith and practice, with which the world is flooded, may be

traced to this prolific source; men leap to their conclusions on religious subjects, before they well understand the premises; and those conclusions are such as suit their own misguided fancy, whether they can be deduced from the word of God by fair means or foul.

Many undertake the study of the Bible with their ultimate conclusions all predetermined. They look into it, not to hear what God is pleased to say, for the purpose of deterring them from sin, and exciting them to seek holiness and heaven; but to see what they can find, to establish themselves in this and that favorite opinion. That such persons should make much progress in sound scriptural knowledge is not to be expected. They do not labor to correct their errors and enlarge their views, a work which cannot be accomplished without labor. They only strive to confirm themselves in their preconceived opinions: in that they generally succeed, no matter how absurd those opinions may be.

6. Let the work of Biblical Interpretation be undertaken with honesty and humility. Human opinions are an empty sound, and even learning is a vain show when arrayed against the truths of the Bible.

Truth will stand; it is destined to a glorious and universal triumph. It will bless and comfort all those who hold it in righteousness. It has outlived the scoffs of the most heaven-daring infidels. The mists of scepticism cannot conceal and essentially darken it, the storms of persecution have been unable to sweep it away. Woe to the man who lifts up

his puny hand against Divine truth. In doing this, he rebels against God, and treasures up wrath against the day of wrath, to be poured out upon his guilty soul.

Joy to that man who is on the side of truth. Truth will be on his side. If he has taken the part of truth against an angry and unbelieving world, truth will take his part against all that may threaten to disturb his peace and destroy his soul. By God's truth he shall be sanctified, and being sanctified shall enjoy a blissful eternity with Him, whose words are truth, whose favor is life, whose loving-kindness is better than life.

The work of Biblical Interpretation is easy to the candid, attentive and prayerful inquirer. By such, the principles and leading rules of this interesting science, will be readily apprehended. To the captious and caviling, they will be more difficult of acquisition; but some knowledge on this subject may be obtained even by them, if they will consent patiently to examine it, in the exercise of their good common sense, to see if these things are so.

Sec. 2. The necessity of a right exercise of the mental faculties in the interpretation of the Bible.

1. The Bible is addressed to mankind as rational beings, and is evidently designed to be a manual of instruction, not to a few privileged individuals only, but to the human race. It consists of a collection of Divinely inspired writings, the productions of different persons, living in different ages of the world, and

using different languages and modes of speech. Every part of it bears manifest marks of having been designed to convey information which was deemed of serious and high importance.

This singular book, exceeding all others in the importance and variety of its communications, containing the most ancient and well authenticated history; the most remarkable and undoubted prophecy; the purest morality; and the only rational system of religious worship; is given us by God as the only authoritative rule of faith and practice.

To its pages we are referred for information respecting our duties and destiny. A competent knowledge of its disclosures, and a due conformity to its precepts, are indispensably necessary to the promotion of our highest temporal or spiritual good. They are an indispensable pre-requisite to our final and eternal salvation. Whatever may be the final allotment of a conscientious heathen, who lives in unavoidable ignorance of this blessed volume, there can be no doubt that those who being in possession of it, fail of obtaining a competent knowledge of its saving truths, will certainly perish in their ignorance.

Faith is insisted on in the Bible, as a fundamental duty; but we cannot believe any further than we understand the true meaning of the Divine communications.

The fact therefore that we are required to believe what God has communicated in the Bible, for our instruction, proves that we are required to understand those instructions correctly. For how is it possible for us to believe what we do not understand?

In being required to exercise faith in the Divine communications, we are of course required to attain the amount and degree of knowledge, which is requisite to the intelligent performance of this exercise. When that degree and amount of knowledge is unattainable, the exercise of a corresponding faith is impossible.

It is obvious therefore, that we are not at liberty to misunderstand or incorrectly interpret the Bible. We are under an indispensable obligation to interpret the word of God correctly. The misunderstanding of it in respect to any of its fundamental truths, is not only a misfortune, but a sin; and one which God has declared he will severely punish.

The fact that we are under obligation to obtain a correct understanding of the Bible, so far at least as to attain the exercise of saving faith, and the practice of evangelical obedience, must be obvious to every candid and enlightened inquirer.

2. From this truth the following equally important truths, may be clearly deduced.

(1.) That the Bible has a determinate sense.

(2.) That we are competent, with such aids as are within our reach, to ascertain that sense with certainty.

If the Bible had no determinate sense, it could not be our duty to understand it as having one. So also if we were incompetent, with such aids as may be obtained, to as certain the true sense of the Sacred Scriptures, no matter how clear and obvious that sense might be to higher intelligences, it could not be our duty to acquire it; neither could that at-

tainment with any propriety be made in any way conditional to our salvation.

The position which is often assumed by the ignorant and unbelieving, that the Bible has no determinate sense; or that its true meaning, if it has one, is utterly unattainable by the human mind, is seen to be entirely false and ruinous. It is equally at variance with the Sacred Scriptures and with reason itself.

3. The fact that the Bible is intelligible, is a pleasing and important one. But it does not authorize the belief that the Divine communications can be understood without attention and effort. The reverse is obvious. Experience and observation abundantly testify, that a careless and inattentive perusal of the Sacred Scriptures, is exceedingly liable to mislead the mind in respect to many most important religious truths.

Amidst the conflicting opinions that prevail in relation to many important religious subjects, it is obvious that many are wrong. Many intelligent persons do fail entirely of understanding aright some of the most important developments of the Divine will.

But to what is this failure to be attributed? Not to any imperfection in the Inspired Oracles of God; not to any want of adaptation in them to the limited capacities of the human mind; but to the perverted and negligent use of those capacities, in the investigation of divine truth.

A negligent and perverted use of the human faculties, is therefore a principal cause of damnable error. In the Interpretation of the Bible, the mind must be

vigorously and correctly exercised in order to bring us to a correct result. If we have fallen into serious errors in this department of human knowledge, we may take the blame of those errors to ourselves. It will be in vain to charge them upon any other being.

God has not in any of his dispensations encouraged either indolence or negligence. Least of all has he done this in the dispensation of truth, whether relating to human science or religion.

While the sluggish exercise of the mental faculties in the investigation of Divine truth generally fails of securing the attainment of much useful knowledge; the diligent and careful exercise of the same, is attended with a rich reward and crowned with unlooked for success. In the Interpretation of the Bible, we find work for our highest mental faculties, and that which requires their most effective exercise. Memory, Judgment, and even Imagination are summoned to put forth their mightiest efforts in this work. It is indispensably necessary to our greatest success, that they should all do their part.

Imagination however, is to be exercised with great caution in this field, as in most others, and only within its legitimate domains. The unlicensed range often given to this faculty in the Interpretation of the Bible, leads to the most disastrous, and even fatal results. It is the parent of extravagance and enthusiasm, and the author of immense injuries to the cause of truth and piety.

SEC. 3. RULES FOR THE RIGHT EXERCISE OF JUDGMENT IN BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION.

1. We ought never to form a judgment till we have duly considered the evidences which relate to the case under consideration. The guide of Judgment is evidence. To determine the most trifling matter without a perfect knowledge of the evidence relating to it, as far as that knowledge can be obtained, is to prejudge the case, and to surrender the interests of truth to the guidance of conjecture. Our conjecture may be right; but it is far more likely to be wrong, inasmuch as the chances for error are far the most numerous.

The formation of judgments in the Interpretation of the Scriptures without a due knowledge and consideration of the evidences relating to each several case, is one of the most fruitful sources of error. No degree of energy or acuteness of our natural faculties of judgment, can compensate for the want of evidences in the formation of our religious opinions and belief.

Powerful and improved natural faculties qualify us to use evidences to the greatest advantage and with the greatest success, but they do not qualify us to judge without evidence, or with that which is imperfect and indecisive, any more than strong and acute powers of vision enable us to see without light, or to see clearly by the aid only of a few scattered rays of that element.

Persons may be ever so well acquainted with the principles and rules of Interpretation, so far as language is concerned, and yet by forming their judg-

ments hastily and without due knowledge and consideration of the evidence relating to the case, fall into the grossest errors.

In this way many important portions of the word of God are daily misinterpreted, which are nevertheless capable of being fully and perfectly understood. Judgment is only the interpreter of evidence. It is the eye which sees that truth only on which the light of evidence is thrown; and with a clearness and certainty proportioned to the clearness and force of the evidence by which it is determined.

A cautious consideration of evidence and a rigid adherence to it, in the Interpretation of the Bible, is the more important, because when erroneous opinions are once formed, it is extremely difficult to dislodge them. The same light that would have put us in possession of the truth before an erroneous opinion was imbibed, will seldom be sufficient to effect the correction of that opinion. When a case has been prejudged, and the mind has settled down in erroneous views of it, months and years of laborious study may be utterly ineffective as to the discovery of truth, which, previous to the adoption of the error in question, might have been ascertained in a day, perhaps in an hour. The strongest intellect is almost as much the dupe of error when once embraced, as the weakest. The mighty in intellect are bound as strongly with the cords of this captivity as the feeble; and seldom effect their escape when once fully enthralled in delusion.

2. We should give their due weight and influence to all the items of evidence which relate to each sev-

eral case of Interpretation. This rule follows naturally the admission of the former. Different modes of Interpretation suggest themselves in connexion with different items of evidence by which they are supported. The sources of evidence ought to be ascertained and examined, and the items furnished by each particular source, carefully considered and compared. Our final judgment ought to be the result of this extended investigation. Nothing less than this, can be satisfactory or safe.

This rule, like the former, is often violated. It is not uncommon for persons to fix on a particular item, or class of evidences, to the entire neglect of others in favor of a different opinion, and which are entitled to an equal amount of influence in the determination of our judgments. Decisions thus obtained are necessarily partial and erroneous.

Whenever the evidences in relation to the true import of a passage of Scripture are contradictory, they must be compared; and that which preponderates must determine our belief. Such cases are not uncommon. They do not occur from any defect or imperfection in the Inspired Oracles, but from the limited nature of the human understanding; and the necessarily limited materials from a consideration of which, our judgments must be formed.

3. We ought to investigate the Scriptures, especially those parts which admit of different modes of Interpretation, and the true meaning of which is a matter of controversy, dispassionately and impartially.

There is no sufficient reason for our being strong-

ly interested in favor of any mode of Interpretation; or strongly prejudiced against it, till we have before our minds the evidence of its truth and correctness, or the contrary. The same principle is universally acknowledged to be valid in relation to the investigation of other subjects. We ought to preserve our minds as far as possible unbiassed in favor of any opinions or against them, till we have obtained decisive evidence of their correctness or incorrectness.

Feeling is no criterion by which to judge of truth. The moment it becomes excited, it presents an obstruction to the exercise of impartial judgment, which no art or power of man may be able to remove or overcome. While feelings of attachment or aversion are unexcited, the understanding may be informed, and the judgment influenced by the full force of evidence. But as soon as feelings of aversion are once aroused against the truth, an effect that may easily be produced by incorrect associations, every avenue to the judgment is effectually closed against evidences, by which that truth is ascertained.

It is not intended by these remarks to discourage the exercise of excited feelings. They ought to be indulged and cherished in their proper place, but not to the prejudice of truth. A court of justice has no right to hear and adjudge causes under the influence of excitement. In the investigation of the Sacred Oracles, the same disturbing cause ought to be carefully avoided, and for equally, and if possible, still more obvious and weighty reasons. The indiscretion contended against, is exceedingly common and pernicious. The most grave investigations, those involv-

ing the eternal welfare of individuals, families, or communities, are frequently prosecuted under the highest excitement of party feeling. It is unnecessry to say, that in such circumstances, truth is put in imminent peril. Let truth be first dispassionately and impartially investigated, and then, and not till then, let feelings of love or hatred, of attachment or aversion, be excited or indulged. Then it will be right and safe to indulge such feelings as truth is adapted to awak n.

4. We ought to investigate every different passage of Scripture, and every different subject by itself. Valuable knowledge is gained by attending to one thing at a time. When we look at one object with our natural eyes, we are able to see it clearly and distinctly; but when we attempt to embrace a number of objects in our view, we do not gain a distinct perception of any of them. The same principle applies to our intellectual vision. We cannot view distinctly different truths at once. Moral and religious investigations are frequently embarrassed by several different subjects being blended confusedly together in the same inquiry; whereas every different subject ought to be discriminated from all others, and examined by itself.

It is one of the devices of sophistry and of deceivers, to produce a confusion of ideas by blending subjects that ought to be viewed separately, and as separate. But this method of procedure finds no place in the theory of rational investigation, whether of religious subjects, or of any other. The principle insisted on in this paragraph, is one of universal appli-

cation. It applies equally to science, business, and religion; and in every application of it, is found to be of fundamental importance. It cannot in any case be neglected with safety. The man who disregards it, must suffer the penalty due to a violation of one of the leading principles of successful exertion in any department of effort.

The foregoing rules relative to the right exercise of the mind in Biblical Interpretation, are all imporant to be known and observed. The neglect of them leads certainly and unavoidably to error, with all its ruinous consequences. We cannot reasonably expect to form right judgments, unless we exercise our minds on the subject in hand, in a proper manner. And we have abundant occasion for gratitude and joy, that in the right exercise of our mental faculties we cannot fail of obtaining whatever knowledge is essential to our present or future felicity. So far as the right exercise of judgment and other mental faculties will lead us to correct results in the business of Biblical Interpretation, we ought to attain such results. We cannot reasonably ask that truth should be attainable in the careless or otherwise incorrect exercise of our mental faculties. And yet unreasonable as it is, that demand is sometimes impiously and audaciously made; and not a few have turned away in disgust from the study of the Bible, because they could not arrive at satisfactory conclusions, without an enlightened, deliberate, and vigorous exercise of their mental faculties on the communications it contains.

CHAPTER II.

THE RULES OR LAWS OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION.

SEC. 1. LANGUAGE CONSIDERED AS A SYMBOL OF THOUGHT.

1. ORAL Language is the expression of our ideas by articulate sounds, which are used as the signs of those ideas. In oral language a single sound, or a number of sounds pronounced continuously, represent a single idea. Instead of having a different sound to represent every idea, human languages have but a few different sounds, and represent all their numerous and diversified ideas, by different combinations of these. One or more single sounds form a word; one or more words form a sentence; one or more sentences a paragraph or discourse.

2. The connexion between words and ideas is mostly arbitrary and conventional. Different nations use very different sounds and combinations of sound, in the communication of their ideas. It is in this, that the diversity of human languages chiefly consists. These languages are made up in part of different elementary sounds; and those sounds which are the same in all, are differently combined with others; and applied, both in their elementary and combined state, to denote different ideas and objects. Those

sounds that are naturally expressive of the ideas which they denote, are exceedingly few, and comparatively unimportant. They consist mostly of interjections. Besides these, there is a remote correspondence between many combinations of sound in every language, and the sense which they convey, that contributes much both to the perspicuity and force of language.

3. Written, is a symbolical representation of oral language, and of ideas. Its object is first, to represent oral language to the eye; and secondly, to represent by letters to the mind, the ideas of which oral language is an appropriate vocal symbol.

A syllable in writing, which consists of one or more letters, corresponds to a sound in speech, and different combinations of syllables, to different combinations of sounds. The object of representing ideas to the mind, is often attained through the medium of letters, when the sounds are not represented at all. We may know the meaning of words, that we do not know how to pronounce.

The deaf and dumb are taught to read, but they know nothing of pronunciation, or of any articulate sounds whatever. Letters are not to them the marks of sounds at all; but the elements or component parts of written words merely, and those words the direct representatives of ideas.

Written language is therefore of a twofold nature: a symbolical representation of oral language; and a symbolical representation of ideas. Every word written represents (1,) a word spoken; (2,) the idea of

which the word spoken is the symbol. Written language is as much the symbol of ideas, as that which is spoken, and represents them as directly to the mind. The correspondence between it and oral language is not necessary; for we might speak one language and write another. But it is convenient; and in consequence of its convenience, has generally prevailed.

Written, being founded upon oral language, is constructed on the same principles, and corresponds to it, word for word, and syllable for sound. It is therefore to be interpreted by the same rules. Whether written or spoken, it is a symbolical representation of thought, and substantially the same thing.

4. Speech and writing have each their peculiar advantages and disadvantages, as symbolical representations of thought. The words may be the same; but in writing, they are permanent; in speech, transient. A written communication admits of a more thorough investigation; a spoken one produces the deepest immediate impression.

Repeated perusal, and accurate investigation of the force of words and phrases, are the principal means of interpreting a written discourse. Tone, emphasis and gesture contribute to illustrate and explain a spoken one. Both are sufficiently perspicuous to the attentive and diligent inquirer. Both are too obscure to be correctly understood in their higher applications, by the inattentive and negligent.

5. Language considered as a product of the human

mind, is one of its noblest products. It is not the creation of an individual, or of an hour; but it is the work of a vast multitude, and of ages.

It is a vast repository of thoughts and feelings, many of which are of the highest order and of the greatest value. It is a repository of circulating thoughts, and the medium by which they are kept in a constant state of progress from mind to mind, and from age to age.

Not the least interesting of the properties of written language is that whereby it is furnished with internal evidence of its true meaning. Every language is its own interpreter, and almost exclusively so, to those who are acquainted with its elements. The right interpretation of language, generally goes far towards proving itself. All language when used with intelligence and propriety, has a true meaning; and is adapted to convey that meaning to all who are duly acquainted with it.

It is only in the hands of the ignorant and unskillful, that this medium for the communication of knowledge can become a dead and unmeaning combination either of letters or sounds.

Sec. 2. The interpretation of language, particularly that of the Bible.

1. The word Interpret, in its most usual sense signifies, to explain the meaning of words to one who does not understand them. It may be accomplished either by expressing the sense of those words by others that are better understood in the same

language, or by translating them into a different language.

Interpretation properly means the act of interpreting. Both imply an understanding of what is to be explained. The theory or science of Interpretation is, properly speaking, the theory or science of language, considered as a medium for the communication of ideas. It embraces the principles and rules, according to which, language is constructed; and by which it is to be understood and explained.

Were there no fixed principles of language, there could be no certain rules of Interpretation. Were these principles incapable of being accurately determined, the rules of Interpretation would be equally incapable of development.

But language has of necessity fixed principles of construction, that are capable of being perfectly ascertained; and these, and these only constitute the basis of an intelligent and intelligible use of it. By these only is it rendered significant of ideas, and by these only, can it be understood or explained.

2. All language however, is not equally perfect in its construction, and even when perfect is not equally perspicuous. Some important and correct combinations of words, are of more difficult interpretation than others; either from the nature of the subjects; from the infrequent use of some one or more of the words which they contain; from complexity of construction; or from other causes.

If the words of which a discourse consists, sustain in their different positions in respect to each other, a known relation to any principle or rule of Inter-

pretation, their meaning can be determined by the application of that rule. If not, their meaning can not be determined by any means whatever. Such cases sometimes occur in human productions. But their occurrence is seldom, and particularly so in respect to the Bible.

3. Cases are more frequent in which the relation of some word or phrase to a known rule of Interpretation is not wholly unknown, but indefinite and ambiguous. When this occurs we may approximate to a definite and precise interpretation, but can never attain it. Ambiguous symbols can never give a determinate sense. It is not the legitimate province of interpretation to put upon language a sense any more determinate, than it really conveys. That which is precise and definite, ought to be interpreted in a precise and definite manner. That which is indefinite and ambiguous, ought to be interpreted as such. Where different meanings are possible, and we are not in possession of any known or ascertainable relation whereby to determine which is intended, we ought not to assume the responsibility of deciding. Our decision in such a case must of course be arbitrary and conjectural. It can make no part of our certain knowledge, and therefore can be of no real use to us.

The utmost that the interpreter can do, is to ascertain and apply the appropriate rules of Interpretation; determine the true result; and report it accurately. In the performance of this work there is a wide field for the exercise of skill and diligence.

4. The rules of Interpretation are numerous. The

relations by which the meaning of words are indicated, are of great variety and extent. To understand all those rules and relations, is a matter which requires patient investigation and extensive research. This is particularly the case in reference to the Bible. The lowest degree of information may be sufficient for the right understanding of some parts of it; but the field which it opens in this department of study, is almost immeasurable.

The most obvious of the rules of Interpretation, are those which are of the most extensive application, and of the greatest importance. But they do not comprehend the whole; neither are they sufficient for the right and certain direction of our judgments in every case; far from it. Sometimes the meaning of a word is indicated by one relation and one rule, and sometimes by another; sometimes by a rule of common and easy application, such as is obvious to every eye, and easy to every mind; and sometimes by one that is of an opposite character in these respects; such as presents itself only to the eye of discriminating and improved judgment; and such as minute attention and perseverance alone can supply or improve.

5. In most cases the meaning of words is not indicated by a single rule, but by several; each independent and decisive. The application of any one however, that it is clear and unambiguous, is sufficient. In cases of the joint application of several, they mutually confirm the result in which they agree.

6. A knowledge of the theory of Interpretation is coextensive with that of the theory of language, con-

sidered as a medium for the communication of thought. Some degree of it is universal. The perfection of it is exceedingly rare.

The art of expressing our ideas by the use of words, and of interpreting correctly the expressions of others, is one, to the attainment of which, the earliest efforts of the human mind are universally directed. The first lessons of childhood have reference to this attainment; and our first valuable acquisitions of knowledge relate to the meaning and use of words. All prosecute this attainment in some way, and to some extent in subsequent life, although few do it systematically and thoroughly. Many understand Interpretation as an art, who know little of it as a demonstrative science, comprehending a complete system of established principles and rules.

A scientific knowledge of this branch of learning is important to all reading men; and particularly so in respect to the two greatest departments of human knowledge, Law and Religion. The extent and variety of matter comprehended under these titles, the precision and accuracy of their developments of principle, and the nice discriminations both of principle and character, with which they abound, render an accurate and comprehensive knowledge of the laws of Interpretation of the highest consequence to the interpreter of either. Every man therefore, who wishes to be his own interpreter of the Bible, ought to acquaint himself thoroughly with these laws.

7. The laws of Interpretation are general and particular. Its general laws are such as are founded in the nature or language generally, and are conse-

quently of universal application. They apply equally to prose and poetry, to expositions of religion and of law, to those which are inspired and uninspired.

Its particular laws are founded on the peculiar properties of the communication to which they relate; and serve to modify, but not to suspend or supercede those which are general.

All the laws of interpretation, both general and particular, must either be self evident, or capable of satisfactory and decisive proof. As far as they are known, they serve as indications of the meaning of words, sentences and discourses, in all the cases to which they apply. Beyond the extent to which they apply, we have no means of knowledge on this subject.

The Bible embraces every diversity of style and composition, and therefore requires a most extensive acquaintance with the laws of interpretation, in order to its being rightly interpreted.

It has both in respect to its character as a whole, and in respect to several of its parts, many striking peculiarities, that essentially modify its meaning, and distinguish it from all other works. It cannot be interpreted and interpreted aright, except by the application of all those general and particular laws of Interpretation which legitimately apply to the exposition of it.

A statement and illustration of these general and particular laws of Interpretation, as far as they are necessary to a right understanding and exposition of the Holy Scriptures, is the appropriate object of Biblical Interpretation, considered as a science. That

object it is the design of the author, humbly and faithfully to prosecute in the following pages.

Sec. 3. Words considered as the elements of language.

1. Words, so far as the indications of thought are concerned, are the elements of language. They consist of one or more syllables or sounds, which are used by common consent as signs of our ideas.

The general properties of words considered as elementary parts of language, fall within the province of the grammarian. The same is true in regard to their mutual relations. Both however, ought to be well understood by the interpreter. Such knowledge is requisite in order that we may appreciate their relative importance; and also to indicate with accuracy and precision, their mutual influence in modifying the meaning of each other.

A sentence is a combination of words expressing a complete sense. Every sentence must contain a subject or thing spoken of; and an attribute or thing affirmed or denied of that subject. A sentence containing one member only, is simple; one containing two or more members, is complex. A combination of sentences constitutes a paragraph, and a combinations of paragraphs, a discourse.

A sentence, paragraph, or discourse, is a complex symbol of thought, that can be understood only by an investigation of its elements, in the particular combination in which they occur. Those elements are words mutually connected by the various ties of

grammatical association, and relationship. The interpretation of language, therefore, is but the interpretation of words which compose it, standing as they do, in the various relations which they sustain, as its component parts.

2. The elements of things are apt to be overlooked, or superficially examined. This is true in respect to words, the elements of language. We do not readily perceive the numerous and important agencies of a single word in facilitating the communication of thought. We often allow delicate and interesting shades of meaning to pass unnoticed, and thus fail of receiving the full impression of what is expressed.

The first step in the business of interpretation is to ascertain the meaning of single words. The explanation of words is prerequisite to the explanation of sentences and discourses. Every word that enters into the texture of a sentence or paragraph, ought to be accurately investigated and understood.

A general and vague impression in respect to the meaning of words is not sufficient. Our knowledge on this subject, ought to be certain and accurate. An erroneous impression in respect to the meaning of a single word, always obscures, more or less, the meaning of the sentence to which it belongs, and not unfrequently that of whole paragraphs and discourses.

3. The office of words, in their being made the medium of Divine communication to man, is immensely important. The words of the Bible rightly interpreted, express the sublime doctrines of religion and mo-

rality. Rightly interpreted, they teach that wisdom which is from above, and are able to make us wise unto salvation. Any considerable mistake in regard to their true meaning, is liable to prove fatal; and will certainly be injurious.

Negligence in ascertaining the meaning of words, is the cause of many pernicious errors, and is itself highly pernicious and criminal. Multitudes are guilty of it, in respect to the Bible, even to a greater degree than they are in respect to other important documents, which it concerns them rightly to understand.

It concerns every man to understand the Bible, and to avoid perverting, in any instance, its divine communications. But there are multitudes who voluntarily and presumptuously neglect their duty, and act contrary to their true interest, in relation to this matter.

Sec. 4. General principles relating to the meaning of single words.

The general principles relating to the meaning of single words, are simple but important. They ought to be clearly perceived and constantly borne in mind while engaged in the Interpretation of the Sacred writings. They are among the most elementary and fundamental principles of human language.

1. Every word has some meaning, either of itself or else as qualifying the meaning of other words, or exhibiting their mutual relations and dependences. Nouns denote the names of things, verbs express some action, being, or state of being; articles, adjec-

tives, and adverbs qualify the meaning of nouns, verbs, &c.; conjunctions and prepositions exhibit the connection and relation of words, phrases, and sentences.

Nouns are the only class of words, out of the nine of which languages generally consist, that are the names of things; and consequently nouns and pronouns are the only classes of words that are used to denote objects of thought, or subjects of discourse. Verbs are indispensable to the expression of action, being, or a state of being. But the other classes of words are as truly significant as these. They have their appropriate offices in facilitating the communication of ideas, each of which is essential to the perfection of language. The communication of ideas through this medium, is effected by the joint significancy and force of all the different classes of words, each performing its particular part, according to its nature and position, in the accomplishment of this object. The noun cannot say to the adjective and preposition, I have no need of you; nor the adjective or preposition to the noun, we have no need of thee; for all are necessary to one another, in order to their accomplishing the high purposes to which they are respectively devoted, and in which they have a mutual participation.

The assertion that every word has some meaning, is true of language generally; but it is emphatically true of the Bible. A word that has no meaning, is of course, useless. It can do no good. Such words, if there were any, would be an incumbrance to any work in which they might be found. They would

be an incumbrance to the Bible, occupying space in its pages, and diverting the attention of its readers to no good purpose. Indeed they would be an anomaly which it would be difficult satisfactorily to account for.

2. Most words have more than one meaning. Any person who has not observed this fact, will be readily convinced of it by turning over the pages of a dictionary, and noticing the various definitions almost universally assigned to words in common use. The fact moreover, is abundantly verified in the observation and experience of every intelligent person.

Thus the word heat denotes, (1.) caloric, a substance which exists in the natural world, and enters into the composition of natural bodies.

(2.) The sensation produced when an additional or unusual quantity of this substance passes into any part of the human body.

(3.) Animal excitement, impassioned feeling.

These significations, it will be observed, are entirely different from each other, and yet they are all among the established and common meanings of a single word, and that a word in common and constant use.

So the word, spirit, denotes, (1.) wind, breath.

(2.) Animal excitement, ardor; as when we say of soldiers, they fought with great spirit.

(3.) The soul of man, or of some other sentient being; an incorporeal, thinking subsistence, such as inhabits and actuates the human body; as when we speak of the spirit of man going upward, at death, and the spirit of a beast going downward to

the earth; and when we speak of God and angels, as being spirits.

(4.) The Holy Spirit. The third person of the adorable Trinity.

(5.) Temper, disposition; as when we say of a man, that he showed a good spirit, or a bad spirit; meaning, evidently, that he showed a good or bad disposition or temper. Several other definitions of this word might be given, but these are sufficient to illustrate the principle under consideration.

Plurality of meanings belonging to the same word, are characteristic of all languages, both ancient and modern.

These meanings may be entirely different and unconnected by any intimate relation, as is strikingly the case with the verb, let, meaning both to permit and to hinder; or as is more usually the case, the different meanings of the same word may, many or all of them, sustain some general relation to each other, such as similarity, either of nature or effect; relation of the cause to the effect, or of the effect to the cause; of contiguity, &c. In many cases, however, the several different meanings of a word are only different modifications of the same general idea, and yet modifications of that idea, so distinct and different, that one cannot be substituted for another, without introducing the utmost confusion, and leading to most palpable errors.

The fact that many words have different meanings, all of undoubted authority, deserves to be particularly considered. Obvious as this fact is, it is sometimes forgotten, to the greatest detriment of the

cause of truth. Having ascertained that a particular word in some connexions and in relation to some subjects, has a particular meaning, many understand it in the same sense in connexions, and in relation to subjects entirely different, without a moments inquiry or hesitation.

They regard the fact of its meaning one thing, in one case, satisfactory evidence, that it has the same meaning in a case entirely different. That fact, however, is no proof at all of the supposition founded upon it. That the same word may have different meanings, is one of the clearest and most obvious truths in this, or any other science; and if so, such words must have one meaning in one connexion, and a different meaning in other and different ones.

We might conceive of a language so copious that no single word in it should have two or more meanings. But it would be a mere conception. The reality has never been attained. Neither is it practicable to attain it. The plan which has been universally adopted, is altogether preferable to this imaginary one, in being at once sufficiently perspicuous, and much easier of acquisition than the other, even if it were carried into effect, could possibly be.

Language being constituted as it is, every interpreter of the Bible ought to familiarize himself with the different meanings of words; and especially should he do this, in respect to those which are particularly important, on account of their being entrusted with the conveyance of the great doctrines of revealed religion. Without this extensive knowledge of the different meanings of words, we shall

be in danger of applying to the explanation of them, the meaning or meanings we are familiar with, when a different, and to us, unknown one, is intended and indicated.

3. Words cannot have a plurality of significations at the same time and in a given position. They may be repeated in different senses even in the same sentence; but each single use of them will be in a single sense. We have a striking illustration of this in Matt. x. 39; where our Savior makes the following declaration: "He that findeth his life shall lose it, and he that loseth his life for my sake, shall find it." Here twice in the same sentence is the word life, and its equivalent, the pronoun it, used in two different senses. It denotes (1.) temporal life; and (2.) spiritual and eternal life; and in the subsequent clause, it is repeated in the same senses. In neither case does this word have two meanings; nor does its single meaning, in either case, comprehend that which it has in the other.

As a further illustration of the fact that words do not possess a plurality of meanings in single instances of the use of them, we may refer to John iv. 24. "God is a spirit." The word spirit has different established meanings, some of which we have already noticed. The question however now is, not what it means in other positions, but what it means here; and whether it has but one meaning, or more. Does it mean breath? No. Does it mean animal excitement? No. Does it mean the Holy Spirit, in distinction from the other persons of the Trinity? No. Does it mean temper or disposition? No. It has not

one of these meanings, any more than it has the meaning or meanings of an entirely different word. Does it mean that God is an incorporeal, sentient, thinking, or in other words, spiritual being; the opposite of sensual? This is obviously its true and only meaning in the present case. In this sense, one of the established senses of this word, it is here used, and not in either of the others. The other meanings of this word, though many of them frequent and obvious in other connexions, are inadmissible here. The attempt to introduce them would produce confusion and difficulty, rather than increase the real and instructive significancy of the passage.

In the figurative use of words, there is no real deviation from the principle of single senses. Words have not a figurative and literal signification at the same time. The moment any word receives a figurative sense, its literal one is entirely superseded. For example, in the expressions, fiery indignation, melting tenderness, burning love; the words fiery, melting, and burning, do not denote those natural changes which in their literal senses they always signify; but simply qualities of the several subjects to which in these phrases, they are applied; qualities at once immaterial and invisible.

So in the sentence, God is a sun and a shield to those who walk uprightly. The words sun and shield are not used to denote the natural objects of which they are the appropriate names, but to represent the Almighty in his peculiar relations to the pious, as their benefactor and protector. This tropical or figurative representation, is made by an allusion

to the usual and literal signification of the words so used; and there is in such cases an implied comparison between the object, being, or action, usually indicated by such words, and those which they figuratively represent.

The same is true in respect to the allegory. The words which constitute an allegory, are used in a single sense, as truly as those which constitute any other class of narratives. The signification of an allegory, as such, is not in single words; but in the objects and relations which those words indicate, being applied collectively to denote different and analogous ones.

The use of words to express a plurality of senses at the same time, would be contrary to the general practice of mankind, except in the case of enigmas, the design of which is not to instruct but to puzzle.

Historians, philosophers, moralists, and poets, use words invariably in single senses. No reader of history, philosophy, ethics, or poetry, thinks of putting a double or treble sense upon the words of authors, in those different departments of literature. The interpreter who should endeavor to do this, would excite general disgust and derision.

The correctness of the principle now under consideration, may be established by an appeal to every man's observation and experience. How are we accustomed to use words ourselves? How are others of our acquaintance accustomed to use them? In a single, or plurality of senses? In single senses, undoubtedly and universally. An exception besides that of enigmas, cannot be found. How do all the

English historians, scholars, poets, and ministers of the gospel use words? In single, or plurality of senses? In single senses, most certainly and without exception. How do other modern and ancient nations use words in this respect? Uniformly in single senses. There is no exception in ancient or modern times, unless it is found in the Bible. Is there any exception to this rule in the Bible? Is there any in the Bible history? No. Is there any in the preceptive parts of the Bible? No. Is there any in the announcement and exposition of its doctrines? Not any. So far there is no difference of opinion among the great body of intelligent and candid interpreters. To the questions here propounded they all answer no.

If there are cases in the Bible in which words are used in a plurality of senses, they are not sufficiently numerous to make that usage the general rule, even for the Bible. For in its history, in its preceptive communications, and in its announcements of doctrine, this usage does not obtain; and these comprehend altogether the greater part of the Sacred volume.

So general is the rule both in the inspired and in uninspired writings, that the contrary can never be admitted without specific and decisive evidence in its favor. And then if admitted at all, it must be as an exception, not as a rule.

Not only is this rule general. It is important and necessary to the clearness and certainty of language. Any deviation from it, in the intercourse of society, or in any department of the literature of the world,

would be attended with most serious disadvantages. We should be obliged in using language constructed on this principle of manifold senses; or in reading such language intelligently, as used by others, to keep along two or more distinct trains of thought in our minds, according to the number of significations our words possessed. But this we could never do. Words used in single senses have meaning enough, when rightly arranged, to occupy our most fixed and our entire attention. Had they ten thousand meanings more, those meanings would be superfluous. One sense is enough for a word in one place, in order to its fulfilling, in the most perfect manner, the conditions which the highest perfection of human language requires.

A language constructed on the principle of manifold senses, however it might suit the capacities of other conceivable beings, would be unfit for the use of men. It would be perfectly unwieldly to our limited faculties. We could not use it at all; or at least, not to advantage. The use of it would require the exercise of more intellect than we have to expend, and of a higher nature than God has given us.

4. The usual and established meaning of words is variable. It is different in respect to many words, at different periods in the history of the same language. A particular signification may be given a word at one period, on the ground of general usage, that cannot at another, either later or earlier. No one can read a page of the older English writers without finding instances of this fact.

Words are permanent symbols of thought, but

having no natural and necessary connexion between them and the ideas they are used to express, they are necessarily liable to a change in respect to usage. A language in common use is constantly fluctuating in respect to the meaning of some of its words. It is never exactly stationary, and cannot be.

Some words are constantly assuming new significations, and some are constantly laying aside old and established ones. Some are becoming more definite and limited in their signification, and some more general and indefinite.

These changes, though constantly going on, occur by a process so gradual and imperceptible, as to be hardly noticed. We seldom observe the process in respect to a particular word, until it is nearly completed; but we are often compelled to acknowledge it when done.

A knowledge of the variation in the meaning of many words, in different chronological periods, is particularly important to the student of the English Bible. This Bible is one of the noblest specimens of the English language, and one of its most ample repositories of standard literature. It comes down to us, venerable with the weight of years, as well as with the dignity of Divinely inspired truth. Its age however, increases in some respects, the difficulties of its interpretation. This is not the fact in regard to its general texture, but it is obviously so in respect to many single words; and that it is so, is by no means strange, considering how greatly the language in common use, differs from that of 1611, the

period when our common English Bible was first published.

The cause of wonder in respect to this subject is, not that so great and general a variation has taken place, in regard to the usual meaning of those words which the Bible contains, but that the instances of this kind are comparatively so few and so unimportant; that amid the manifest and numerous changes of so many years, so little obscurity has been cast over the sacred volume by these changes. These variations, however, though unimportant in respect to the great mass of the sacred writings, are not so in themselves, or in respect to the particular words to which they relate, and the particular passages in which they occur.

5. The true meaning of words when correctly and judiciously used, is always capable of being ascertained by a due consideration of existing evidence. A writer who introduces words into his discourse which are not capable of being correctly explained by a recurrence to existing evidence, and who does not himself, in some way, indicate unequivocally their true meaning, violates one of the fundamental laws of language.

In determining the meaning of words, therefore, we are always authorized to proceed on the assumption, that indications of their true sense exist somewhere, unless they have been lost. Such indications must have existed either external to the particular discourse in which any word in question occurs, or else within it. They are therefore to be sought both externally and internally.

6. Many words are capable of being used in arbitrary senses, different from any that appropriately belong to them, which are generally termed their tropical or figurative meanings. The words so used are denominated tropes, or figures of speech. Any word is made a trope or figure of speech, by being used in a tropical or figurative sense. When this tropical sense becomes a common one, as is sometimes the case, the word ceases to be a trope, though expressing a sense which was once tropical.

The tropical significations of words are numerous and various. They are capable of being multiplied and varied to an indefinite extent; and when used with propriety, are also as capable of being ascertained with accuracy as any other meanings of which words are susceptible. Whatever ideas they are intelligently and correctly used to express, they are capable of expressing. If the ideas they are used to express are well defined, they will express them as such; if vague and indefinite, they will of course, make a corresponding indefinite impression. Language cannot legitimately convey what was never committed to it. The ideas it communicates, must be no other than those it has received. Such as it receives, such it gives to all who are capable of appreciating its unambiguous signs. This is as true of tropical or figurative language, as of that which is most strictly literal.

In all tropical expressions, the literal meaning of the tropical word is an index to its tropical sense. A knowledge of its literal meaning is necessary in order to our understanding its tropical one, but does

not constitute any part of it. Its tropical meaning is one distinct and peculiar, over and above its ordinary one, though in part indicated by it.

The tropical or figurative use of words is almost universal. In admitting of this arbitrary designation to express ideas and qualities entirely different from any which belong to their established significations, the variety, extent, power, and beauty of language are increased beyond what could otherwise be attained.

The literal meanings of words are fixed by mutual agreement and custom. We are obliged to take them as they are. Their figurative meanings, however are matters of individual fabrication. We may make and vary them to any extent that our imaginations allow. In this fabrication we have a field for the highest efforts of genius and taste; a field on which many golden harvests have been reaped, and one whose capacity of production is still undiminished.

Those tropical modes of expression which occasion most difficulty to interpreters generally, and to Biblical interpreters in particular, are the metaphor, allegory, and metonymy. Others are important, particularly personification, which is of frequent occurrence in the Bible, and also hyperbole, irony, &c. but they seldom occasion any serious difficulty in the department of Interpretation.

Metaphors. A metaphor is a figure of speech in which one or more words are used out of their ordinary sense, to express a different, but similar or analogous meaning.

Metaphors are not simple comparisons or similitudes. For in a simple comparison, every word is used in its proper and ordinary sense, and applied to its appropriate object. But in metaphorical expressions, this is not the case. For example, God is a *consuming fire*. Christians are *the light* of the world. Christ is *the good shepherd*, and the pious are *the sheep* of his care. In these sentences, the words marked by italics as metaphorical, are not used in their ordinary and proper significations ; but in different and similar or analogous ones. The departure from the ordinary sense of these words, in the above examples, is total and obvious. God is not literally a consuming fire ; nor Christians light ; nor Christ a shepherd ; nor his followers sheep. These declarations however, are not false, or unmeaning, or even obscure. Every word of which they consist, has a true and specific sense, which is indicated with sufficient clearness to candid and attentive readers. Fire denotes those qualities and operations of God, that are analogous to literal fire ; light, those qualities and operations of the pious, which are analogous to light ; good shepherd, the relation and character of Christ, as our moral teacher, governor, and protector ; and sheep, those of Christians, as being the subjects of Divine teaching, government, and protection.

Metaphors are founded on analogy or similitude. The literal meanings of words bear a strict analogy to their metaphorical ones. It is impossible to put a metaphorical sense upon any word, that shall not be analogous to one of its literal meanings. A per-

ception of resemblance between different ideas, suggests the application of the appropriate symbol of one of them, to denote another. A perception of this related idea is as necessary in the interpretation of metaphorical language, as it is in its construction. That related idea however, though obtained by recurring to the literal sense of the metaphorical word, is no part of its meaning, considered as a metaphor, or symbol of thought metaphorically expressed.

The true meaning of a metaphorical expression, is not the literal meaning of the words so used, but the figurative or tropical sense they are designed in each particular connexion to express.

Allegories. An allegory is a continued metaphor, and differs from that figure in being of greater length. A metaphor consists of single words and phrases; but an allegory of single sentences and paragraphs; or even of an entire discourse.

The metaphor is founded on resemblance. The same is true in respect to the allegory. In an allegory, one thing is expressed, or one series of facts is described, with a view to illustrate some related subject or series of facts. The narrative of the prodigal son; Luke xv. 11—32: That of the marriage of the king's son; Matt. xxii. 2—13: That of letting out the vineyard; Matt. xxi. 33—41: That of the sower and seed; Matt. xiii. 3—8: and the parables of the New Testament generally are of this class.

The significancy of an allegory depends upon a manifest resemblance between the allegorical statement, literally interpreted, and the thing signified by it. In proportion as that resemblance is obvious and

striking, will the allegory be both intelligible and impressive.

Allegories are made use of to express a sense over and above the proper sense of the narrative of which they consist, and entirely distinct from it; a sense of which the literal one is an index or symbol.

An examination of either of the New Testament allegories above referred to, will abundantly confirm this statement. That of the prodigal son, for instance, was not designed to teach us the particular series of facts, which make up the narrative. Those facts have undoubtedly occurred in numberless instances. A knowledge of them is capable of being obtained from the legitimate sources of such information. Our Savior's design in this narrative, however, was to communicate by means of this, a higher series of facts, in relation to man, considered as a sinner. Agreeably to this intention, the father represents God, and the sons, the rational and moral creatures of God. The word father, is not a metaphor; but it is a part of the allegory; and has an allegorical sense, precisely the same as if it was a metaphor, used to denote God. The same is true of the word son; of his departure, dissipation, misery, repentance, and return to his father's house. All these transactions are the symbols of other and higher transactions, which have a corresponding character; and which relate to the dealings of God with sinners, and to their conduct in respect to him.

The words which constitute this allegory, have their appropriate literal or metaphorical significations, subordinate to their allegorical one. But these

are not their true and full import in the present case. They are only indications of it. Their allegorical sense is that which they are principally designed to express, and with this their true and ultimate significancy in the present case, begins and terminates.

Metonymy. Metonymy embraces a class of tropical words that are analogous to metaphors. They are founded on some relation which one object bears to another, in virtue of which, the name of the former may be used to denote the latter; or that of the latter to denote the former. To this class belong those modes of expression in which the name of a cause is used to denote the effect; or that of an effect to denote the cause; the name of a whole to denote a part, or that of a part to denote a whole; that of a container to denote the thing contained; or that of the thing contained to denote the container, &c.

For example, to bear sins, means to bear the consequences or punishment of sins. Drinking of this cup, means drinking of what this cup contains. Then went out all Judea, and Jerusalem, and all the region round about Jordan, and were baptized, means there went out many of the people of those places, &c.

The metonymical use of words is never authorized except in such circumstances, that their true meaning will be obvious to careful and attentive readers. The same is true in respect to all other tropical modes of speech; of which there are several.

Personification. Personification is a figure of

speech, which consists in ascribing life and action to inanimate objects. As, hear, O earth! The deep lifted up its voice. The mountains trembled.

Hyperbole. Hyperbole consists in magnifying an object beyond its proper bounds; not with a view to deceive, but to secure a proper degree of attention, and to make a suitable and just impression on the mind of the reader or hearer.

Instances of both are frequent in the Bible, as they are in every species of impassioned and animated discourse. They are capable of accurate interpretation, according to their respective characters, and the connexions in which they occur.

Sec. 5. Rules for determining the literal meaning of single words.

Literal, in its application to the meaning of words, signifies not tropical or figurative. It comprehends all those significations which appropriately belong to words as the established and conventional symbols of thought.

It is in their literal sense that words are generally used. It is by the use of words in this sense, that all accurate and precise information and instruction are conveyed, both in respect to science, politics, and religion.

The investigation of the literal meaning of words, is therefore one of the most important branches of the study of language. Our determinations in respect to this subject, have relation to the greater part of the Bible, and to those portions of Bible truth, which God has seen fit to present in the most accu-

rate and determinate mode of which language is susceptible.

The accuracy and precision of language, when used in its literal sense, entitles it to an investigation of a corresponding character. Besides, the interpretation of tropical language depends entirely on the literal meaning of the words so used. The literal meaning of all the words of the Bible, and the different senses in which some of them are used in different connexions, are the appropriate objects of inquiry to every reader of that blessed volume. They are objects of inquiry that have been too much neglected; and consequently imperfectly understood, and often incorrectly explained.

Great attainments are possible in this department of sacred learning. It is one which every man has an interest in prosecuting, and which may be prosecuted successfully by every man. It is not to be supposed that every man can possibly know all that is capable of being known, respecting the literal meaning of all the words of the Bible; but that every man may learn much that is important, and indeed, that which will be sufficient for the full security of his immortal interests, is a matter of demonstrative certainty; and one that will be generally conceded.

Some knowledge of the literal meaning of the words of the Bible, is in the possession of every one who knows any thing about the English language, or any other in which the Sacred Oracles are treasured up, either as origina documents or faithful translations. But the knowledge of most on this subject

is confessedly imperfect, to a fault. And this ignorance is the more injurious in consequence of its being indulged to a great extent unconsciously.

Those who have examined particularly the sources of information respecting this subject, are comparatively few. The views of the multitude in relation to it, are inaccurate and undefined ; and rather the result of casual association, than of profound investigation and judicious study. The object of the present section is to exhibit the principles which indicate the true sense of words, and to direct the unexperienced and doubtful inquirer after truth, to the sources of correct and certain information on this subject. We may sometimes recur to the sources of knowledge without obtaining the information we desire. But the cases in which we do this for the purpose of determining the meaning of words without success, are few and comparatively unimportant.

We are constantly engaged in determining the literal meaning of words, in the ordinary intercourse of society, as well as in the interpretation of the Sacred Oracles. How do we accomplish this work? What are the principles and rules by which we are governed in all correct decisions on this subject? Answer. The ordinary and unequivocal indications of the meaning of words, are comprehended under the following heads.

1. General and particular usage.
2. Logical definitions.
3. The nature of the subject.
4. The obvious purpose and design of the discourse.

5. The position of words in the sentence where they occur.

6. The context.

7. Examples.

8. Comparisons.

9. Antitheses.

10. Parallel passages.

All these are important. They constitute a key to the right exposition of words and sentences. Without some knowledge of them, language generally, and particularly that of the Bible, would be inexplicable. By the dextrous and skilful use of them, this complex and diversified symbol of thought is made to yield up its treasures at the bidding not of a few master spirits only, but of the human race. They are the ultimate and almost only sources of information on the subject in question, and deserve to be prayerfully and attentively considered.

1. *General and particular usage.* General usage denotes that use of words in which people generally agree. It is not necessary however, that this agreement should be universal. It may admit of occasional exceptions, both in respect to individuals, and in application to particular subjects. It may have reference to a single meaning, or to several meanings of which a word is susceptible.

As far as general usage in respect to particular words is known, it is a certain rule of interpretation. In the absence of proof to the contrary, every word is to be interpreted in that signification, or in one of those several significations, which are sanctioned by general usage. Where the general use of a word is

not fixed, or not known, we are obliged to have recourse to other principles for determining its signification. When that use is fixed and known, it may be departed from, but never without evident reason; and not unless the fact is indubitably indicated by evidence.

Particular usage is that in which a writer or speaker departs from the fixed and known acceptation, in which a word is used, and establishes a different usage, not sanctioned by that of others generally. It is not necessary that an individual should be alone in attaching a peculiar meaning to a word, in order that his usage should be entitled to the appellation of particular. If he is in a decided minority, this will be the case.

Whenever a particular usage is established in the case of an individual or class of persons, in respect to a word, that word, in their communications, is to be interpreted according to that particular usage, and not according to the more general usage of others. In the absence of evidence to the contrary, that usage is always to be observed. Like general usage, when not superceded by this, it may be departed from, but never without manifest reason and necessity.

The reason of this rule in respect to general and particular usage, is obvious. General usage is the highest authority in respect to the true meaning of words. Those who use language, seek their information in respect to the meaning of words, from this source. To this standard, as far as they have ascertained it, they naturally endeavor to conform. They

have an interest in doing so. An unnecessary deviation from common usage, in respect to the signification of words, renders our communications obscure and incorrect. No intelligent writer practices it, without what he supposes to be a good reason for doing so; and in that case, he finds it necessary to indicate clearly, by definition or otherwise, what his peculiar usage is.

In relation to general and particular usage, the sacred writers are to be placed at least on an eqality with others. They are entitled to more than this, inasmuch as their inspiration secured them from errors in this respect, into which others are liable to fall. Uninspired writers may be inaccurate, and through their inaccuracy, deceptive or unintelligible; but this can never have been the case with those who were guided by the Spirit of inspiration.

A frequent reference to approved dictionaries, with a view to ascertain the different meanings which general usage has accorded to words, is highly necessary to qualify us for the business of Biblical Interpretation. This is a department of study too much neglected by ordinary readers of the Bible. A constant prosecution of it, would greatly increase their ability to interpret the Bible correctly; and would greatly improve their apprehensions of its meaning generally. It would utterly dissipate the obscurity which to the view of multitudes, hangs like a thick cloud over many of the most interesting disclosures of Divine truth.

Habits of careful and extensive reading, have a similar effect, in increasing our knowledge of the proper

and generally accredited signification of words; and contribute to increase our qualifications for the business of interpreting the Bible or any other book.

2. *Logical definitions.* Writers may define their words either by the use of others in connexion with them, as synonymous, or by specifying the properties of the object or action to which they are applied. In many cases the definition of words by synonymous terms, is the most concise, and at the same time sufficiently clear. When this mode of defining words is not practicable, the same object may be attained by the more protracted method of specifying the leading properties or attributes of the object or action referred to. Sometimes a partial definition is sufficient to put the reader in full possession of the author's meaning, when the entire want of any thing of the kind, would have left his assertion either equivocal or obscure.

Every judicious writer defines his terms either perfectly or in part, wherever he supposes it necessary for the information of the readers for whom his communication is designed.

This course has been pursued by the inspired writers, as well as by others. Many of their words, they have either perfectly or in part defined. The meaning of those words therefore, is to be determined by their own direct exposition of it. Not a single inspired definition, whether designed to be complete or partial, can be neglected with safety. The least deviation from them, in cases to which they legitimately apply, is a deviation from certain and inspired truth.

The practice of introducing logical definitions wherever they are necessary, is suggested by common sense, and sanctioned by common usage. It is the practice of the writers of every age and country, and of every class, from the lowest and most illiterate, to those of the greatest refinement and learning.

An adherence to these definitions therefore, when they are introduced, is but acting in conformity with one of the first principles of verbal communication. It is as necessary to the right interpretation of the Sacred Scriptures as it is to that of any other class of writings.

Under the head of logical definitions, may be comprehended the mention of all those circumstances and relations which possess a definitive character. These are numerous, and the mention of them is frequent, both in the Scriptures and in human productions. The timely and appropriate introduction of them, contributes essentially to promote the perspicuity both of written and oral language, but particularly of the former.

Of these, the circumstances of time, place and order, are important; and the relation of cause and effect, antecedence and consequence.

The relations of similarity and contrast, are not included under this head, being deemed worthy of a separate place among the rules of Interpretation. The range however, within which this rule is designed to apply, is by no means limited, or the cases unimportant.

3. *The nature of the subject.* The subject of every sentence, is that to which the sentence chiefly re-

lates. The subject of a paragraph or discourse, is that to which the paragraph or discourse chiefly relates. The subject of a discourse may be termed a general one, and that of a paragraph or sentence subordinate.

These subjects are often fully or partially known, and in such cases, afford essential aid in determining the meaning of words relating to them. When they are known, and as far as they are known, they ought to be constantly kept in view, in determining the signification of single words.

A due consideration of them is necessary to the right understanding of some words, in every discourse however simple, and in almost every paragraph.

This rule, though understood theoretically by few, is practically understood, to some extent, by all. We learn to apply it in some cases almost as soon as we learn the use of language. We apply it in explanation of the meaning of many words, from our early childhood, and continue to do so through all our later years. Without the application of it in any instance, the ordinary intercourse of society could not be successfully carried on, or the ordinary productions of genius and erudition understood.

There are three cases in which a regard to the subject treated of, is necessary.

(1.) When the word whose meaning we wish to determine has several different and well established significations. Many of the most important words, both of common and occasional use, are of this description, and afford frequent occasion for the appli-

cation of the rule under consideration. It is often impossible in the interpretation of these words, to determine which of their several meanings is intended, in any other way. The neglect to apply this rule in such cases, and the careless application of it, have been a fruitful source of error.

(2.) When a word has a single and definite signification, which we have not the direct means of ascertaining with certainty, from the general sources of information, or in regard to which, those whom we deem high authorities, differ in opinion. These words are generally of the class last mentioned; that is, having a plurality of significations, but at the same time are assigned by particular usage to express a particular and controverted meaning, in particular connexions, and in relation to particular subjects.

The question in this case is not whether a particular established meaning is the true one, in a particular class of passages; but whether a particular controverted meaning can be established as the true one. In the prosecution of such inquiries, which are not unfrequent in the study of the Scriptures, a competent and accurate knowledge of the subject, and a due regard to it, are of the utmost importance.

(3.) When a word is used in a tropical or figurative sense, to express an idea which is not included among its established meanings. In all such cases, which are of frequent occurrence, a regard to the known nature of the subject is indispensable, and generally decisive of the meaning intended.

The subject referred to may be either the leading

subject of a discourse, or the subordinate one of a paragraph or sentence. A word may be used in direct relation to either, and is to be explained by that to which it directly relates; but always in conformity with the nature of the leading and general subject.

Our knowledge of the nature of the subject, in any particular case, depends of course very much on our previous acquirements. Different persons possess different degrees of it, in relation to the same case. All however, possess some degree of such knowledge in reference to many of the subjects treated of in the Scriptures, and in other works.

There are many exhibitions of truth, both in the Bible and in human productions, which ignorant persons are not competent to understand. They cannot be understood without previous knowledge of those truths that are more simple and elementary, and which serve to elucidate them. If persons will not take the pains requisite to obtain this previous knowledge, they must expect to be shut out from a perception of the higher mysteries, both of science and religion.

There is a natural order to be observed in the attainment of knowledge, both human and divine. We must first learn that which is simple. We may then enter with success on the investigation of that which is complicated, and comparatively obscure.

The attainment of a knowledge of letters, precedes that of words, sentences, and discourses. The reader is first put to reading that which is simple and easy; and afterwards that which is more difficult and

obscure. So in every science. The elements are first studied, and afterwards their complex applications and relations.

This principle is too much overlooked by the would-be interpreters of the Bible. Many who can hardly interpret the simplest of our municipal laws, or of those legal instruments which are the charters of our personal rights and privileges, have the arrogance not only to sit in judgment on the deepest mysteries of religion; but confidently to oppose their superficial, contradictory, and absurd interpretations of Divine truth, against the almost unanimous verdict of the Christian world.

But what! says the objector. Am I not to think for myself? Has not every man a right to be his own interpreter of the Sacred Oracles? Most certainly. But you are to think according to the dictates of reason and judgment. And if you presume to interpret the Sacred Oracles, which you are bound to do according to your ability, for yourself; you are to do it according to the established laws of language, and the known dictates of reason.

One of those laws undoubtedly is, that the known nature of the subject contributes to determine the signification of many of the words relating to it; and that as far as knowledge of that subject can be obtained from other sources, such knowledge is often indispensably necessary to the right understanding of particular exhibitions of truth respecting it.

There is that in the Bible which the most simple and ignorant can understand; and there is that among the sublime and recondite disclosures of this volume,

which the most simple and ignorant cannot fully understand, and are not competent to interpret. They must correct gross ignorance by the patient investigation of that which is simple and easy, before they can possibly grasp that which is in its nature, or in the circumstances and mode of its exhibition, complicated and obscure.

They must ascertain something of the nature of religious subjects from those Biblical expositions of them, which are simple and elementary, before they can possibly interpret aright, such as are abstruse and complicated.

A mistake in regard to the nature of the subject treated of, in substituting for it something else, or in misapprehending its characteristic features, is the cause of multiplied subordinate and fundamental errors, in determining the meaning of words. Such mistakes are often the result of prejudice and negligence, where there is otherwise no want of previous and elementary knowledge on the subjects exhibited.

4. *The obvious design and purpose of a discourse.* By the design and purpose of a discourse, is meant the end which the author had in view in writing it; or the particular impression, or conviction which, considered as a whole, it is adapted to make on the mind of an unbiased reader.

This design may be simple, or complex; manifest, or obscure; according to the nature of the discourse, and the circumstances in which it is constructed. Sometimes it is explicitly asserted; sometimes indi-

cated by circumstantial evidence; and often by the internal structure of the discourse and the context.

When the design of a discourse is obvious, no matter by what means it is made so, it affords valuable aid for determining, with precision, the meaning of many words which it contains. Writers often use words that would be otherwise indeterminate or obscure, in reliance on the manifest design of their discourse, to indicate the sense they attach to them. Such indication of the sense intended, is sufficient in thousands of cases, when correct interpretation would be greatly embarrassed, if not rendered impossible, without it.

The purpose and design of a discourse, when manifest, is one of the principal means of rendering the signification of those words which have different established senses, as well as those whose significations are in their nature indefinite, expressive of a definite and certain sense. Much of the perspicuity and precision of language, are owing to this principle; and in the absence of it, or through ignorance of it, would be unavoidably and irrecoverably lost.

The known design and purpose of the discourse is often useful in giving clearness and sufficiency to other indications of the true sense of important words. When that sense is made probable by other evidence, confirmation derived from this source, is often decisive; converting what would otherwise be probability, into certainty. When we should otherwise hesitate between different interpretations, both sustained by some degree of probable evidence, the design and purpose of the discourse not unfre-

quently turns the scale, and makes the ground of correct judgment substantial and obvious.

The rule that words ought to be interpreted in accordance with the manifest design and purpose of the discourse, ought to be applied to all the cases where it is truly applicable. These are numerous. But it ought to be used with especial caution. Much consideration is often requisite, to determine what the design and purpose of a discourse is, even where that point is capable of being fully ascertained. Having settled that point correctly, we ought to be particularly strict and thorough, in determining its bearing on the interpretation of single words. We ought not to decide that a word is required to be interpreted in a particular sense, in preference to some other possible one, on this ground, unless the reason for such an inference is obvious and decisive.

The rule under consideration is useful in enabling us to detect erroneous interpretations, as well as to establish and confirm those which are right.

Whatever difficulty there may often be in determining whether the agreement of a particular signification of a word, with the design and purpose of a discourse or paragraph, affords decisive evidence or not, in its favor; there can be no doubt that in respect to the Bible, any interpretation in regard to which there is a manifest disagreement of this kind, must be erroneous.

5. *The position of words in a sentence;* or what is the same thing, their grammatical relations. Words which belong to the same sentence, contribute essentially to illustrate and explain each other. This is

particularly true of those which are grammatically related in respect to qualification, concord, or government. The adjective and adverb limit the signification of the words which they qualify, and assist in expressing the different modifications of the same general idea, both in respect to the more delicate shades of meaning, and in respect to such as are palpable and obvious. The nominative helps to determine the signification of the verb, and is often decisive in this respect; and the verb, in turn, sometimes illustrates the true meaning of the nominative, where it is not fully indicated by other means; and also that of other related words, particularly the object on which its action, when it is active, terminates.

Almost every word in a sentence, in addition to its own separate meaning, helps to fix and indicate the meaning of one or more related words. We avail ourselves of aid from this source, unconsciously, and almost incessantly. We could not easily maintain the ordinary intercourse of socicty without it. Many modes of expression, that are now perspicuous and unequivocal, would become of an opposite character, if it were not for this principle.

The study of a foreign or ancient language, affords impressive evidence of the reality and value of the principle stated in this paragraph. Every one who has in riper years commenced the study of a language, knows what perhaps he had failed to observe in respect to his vernacular tongue, that he can make no considerable progress in determining the mean-

ing of single words, till he has ascertained with precision their grammatical relations.

6. *The context.* Any portion of Scripture is denominated a text. Those parts of the Sacred Oracles which are contiguous to any text, and which belong to the same discourse, are called its context, or adjoining text. The context includes those passages that immediately precede, and those that immediately follow the text to which they relate.

Such is the mutual connexion between the contiguous parts of a well constructed discourse, that a consideration of one is often necessary to a right understanding of another. That which precedes, prepares the way for that which follows; and that which follows illustrates and defines that which precedes. Thoughts occur in train to the mind of a writer. One suggests another, and the expression of one often renders that of a related one necessary to its full development. The train of thought is denoted by the context. This is often sufficient of itself, to indicate the sense of important, and otherwise ambiguous words.

The context, or train of thought, or series of the discourse, are forms of expression which relate to the same subject, and amount substantially to the same thing. The extent to which they illustrate the meaning of single words, is truly surprising to one that has not paid particular attention to this department of the laws of Interpretation. They are referred to incessantly in all our reading, both of the Scriptures and of human productions. Some parts of almost every discourse would be utterly unintelli-

gible, if it were not for the light reflected from this quarter. A complex and unusual construction of words in a sentence, and the use of words that are indefinite in their nature, or unusual and inperfectly understood, are often illustrated by the context, when other sources of evidence fail.

So habitual is the use we make of this rule, in all our reading, both of the Scriptures and of human productions, that we are hardly sensible of it. In most cases of difficulty, we do it naturally, and almost unconsciously; and usually with perfect facility and complete success.

And yet, as is too often the case in respect to all the other rules of Interpretation, so in respect to this, we sometimes hurry to a conclusion, or give up an inquiry in discouragement, without making that effectual use of it, which might be made.

7. *Examples.* An example is a particular instance illustrating a word, a general rule, precept, or proposition of any kind. An instance of the exercise of faith in the case of Abraham, or of any other true believer, is an example of faith. An instance of prayer, is an example of prayer; one of love is an example of love; and so in respect to other principles and precepts, that might be mentioned or referred to indefinitely.

The formal introduction of examples, for the purpose of illustration, is exceedingly common and highly useful. They are often also introduced informally, and serve to illustrate the true meaning of words, in subordination to other, and even higher designs.

Writers on the sciences and arts, find it necessary

to make frequent and almost constant use of examples, for the purpose of expressing their ideas with clearness. Without the aid derived from this mode of illustration, their instructions would, in many cases where they are now obvious, be exceedingly difficult of apprehension, if not utterly unintelligible. Our expositions of human science and art, are full of examples illustrative of the meaning of propositions and principles, or what amounts to the same thing, of the meaning of words. A man that should endeavor to investigate and interpret them, without attending at all, or even closely, to those examples, would find himself engaged in a Herculean task. Such folly however, in respect to works on human science, is seldom indulged to any considerable extent. It very soon corrects itself, and convicts its subject of his error.

Religion affords the theater on which human folly has effected its most extravagant developments. Here the ridiculous has raved in the stolen garb of sublimity ; and errors that would have ensured contempt and scorn in any other relation, have been stumbled upon by deceivers and the deceived, as the very stepping stones to earthly distinction and heavenly glory.

The Bible is an exposition of religious science. It abounds with examples illustrative of the meaning of its principal words. The interpreter is as much required to notice these examples, and adhere to them, as the student of human science is, to avail himself of the similar illustrations with which that is furnished.

The examples of the Christian duties and virtues, which shine forth from every part of the Bible, afford the most important aid in determining, with precision, the meaning of the numerous terms by which those subjects of inspired truth are severally indicacated. The same is true of many sins which the Scriptures prohibit. What they are is indicated by examples, as effectually as in any other way; and example sometimes places in the clearest light particular prohibitions that would be altogether obscure without this illustration.

Those interpretations of the preceptive portions of the Bible, which are not in conformity with its examples, must of course be wrong. Such interpretations are not uncommon with that numerous class of persons, who wish to restrict and soften down the Bible system to as near a conformity as possible, with the usages and dictates of unhumbled and unsanctified nature.

8. *Comparisons.* A comparison is an assertion, in which one object or attribute is represented as having some resemblance or analogy to another. It consists of the enunciation of two different ideas, either simple or complex, with an express indication of some analogy or resemblance between them.

That class of comparisons which is designed to improve our conceptions of the object, or ideas compared, is most particularly useful in promoting the perspicuity of language, and facilitating its interpretation. The very design of this numerous class of comparisons, renders it necessary, that the idea or object to which another is compared, should be

one that is easily or generally understood by those for whom the communication is designed. There are many cases in which the method of illustrating the meaning of our words by comparisons, is superior to any other. It is therefore in common use with every class of writers, both sacred and profane. And in making use of comparisons, where they occur, to illustrate the meaning of the words which enter into them, we are only acting in conformity with the very design and purpose of their introduction. The neglect to do this, is an obvious and criminal neglect of one of the sources of information on this subject, which, wherever it exists, sheds a clear and certain light on the path of correct interpretation.

9. *Antitheses.* An antithesis is an assertion in which one object or attribute is placed in opposition to another of the same kind, for the purpose of presenting one or both of them vividly and forcibly to the mind. The design of the antithesis is to promote clearness and force of expression. This design, when used judiciously, it effectually accomplishes. Many statements both of fact and of doctrine, which would be sufficiently explicit and perspicuous, to be understood when stated singly, are made still more so when expressed antithetically.

Antithetical expressions are frequent in the Sacred Scriptures, and contribute to promote and establish the correct interpretation of their doctrines.

The ideas antithetically expressed, are indicated by the natural meaning and force of the words which compose the respective members of the antithesis;

and are still further evinced by the light of contrast which is reflected from each to the other. The principle by which we ought to interpret antitheses, is that of their construction, namely; that the two parts express corresponding and directly opposite ideas of the same generic kind. By a careful observance of this principle, when one branch of the antithesis is definite and the other is indefinite, in itself considered, the former may afford essential aid in determining the signification of the latter. So that if either branch of an antithesis is clear, we may derive from it effectual aid in determining the sense of the corresponding and opposite branch.

A knowledge of this principle is useful for the confirmation of many important conclusions, respecting the meaning of Scripture expressions, derived from other sources. There is hardly a material error that may not be controlled by it, and hardly a Bible-truth to which it does not afford confirmation. A careful study and intelligent application of the principles relating to antitheses greatly facilitate both the discovery of truth and the detection of error.

For example, Mark xvi. 16; "He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." This passage is evidently an antithesis, a direct opposition of meaning existing between its members. Believers are a class of persons the very opposite of unbelievers, in respect to the exercise of faith. Being saved, is the opposite of being damned. All this is too obvious to admit of a reasonable doubt. It is perceived intuitively and instantly, the moment a man, familiar with the lan-

guage of the Scriptures, fixes his attention upon the passage. The antithetical relation of the phrases, "shall be saved," and "shall be damned," proves, aside from any evidence derived from other sources, that they are not of similar but of opposite import. The subjects of these two sentences, are men of opposite characters, in respect to faith; the predicates denote opposite states of being, which result from these opposite characters, and correspond to them. Being damned, therefore, as used in this passage, is the reverse of being saved by faith. If being saved by faith in Christ, denotes a transient and trivial benefit; being damned for unbelief in respect to him, may denote for aught that appears in this passage, a transient and trivial inconvenience or injury. But if, as it is undoubtedly the fact, salvation by faith in Christ, comprehends our future and eternal felicity in heaven; then as certainly, does damnation comprehend the reverse of this, our future and eternal misery; the misery of hell. This conclusion is legitimate and inevitable, because what is affirmed in one member of the antithesis, cannot, without absurdity, be comprehended in the affirmation of the other. Salvation and damnation are not only different, but opposite states of being.

An examination of Matt. xxv. 46, will lead to a similar result. "These shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal." In this passage, these, referring to the wicked, is placed in direct contrast with, the righteous, as denoting persons of an opposite character. This is in conformity with the usage of the sacred writers gen-

erally. So also, eternal life, the portion of the righteous, is placed in contrast with eternal or everlasting death, the allotment of the wicked. The words translated eternal and everlasting, are the same in the original, and were injudiciously varied, in the translation in common use, merely for the sake of euphony or agreeable sound. The life eternal, and everlasting and eternal punishment, are opposed to each other, as contemporaneous states of being. If the former therefore, denotes as it must do, the endless felicity of heaven, the latter can designate nothing less than the contemporaneous and equally endless miseries of hell.

10. *Parallel passages.* The occurrence of the same word in two different passages of Scripture, does not necessarily constitute them parallel. As most words have several different significations, they may of course, be used in different connexions, to designate ideas entirely different. Neither does the use of any particular word in the same sense, in different passages of Scripture, constitute them necessarily parallel. This may occur and the subjects be entirely different.

Parallel passages are those which relate to the same subject, and express a similar sense. No others are properly of this class. All that possess this relative character, whether their phraseology is similar or diverse, are comprehended under this denomination. Great diversity of expression may exist in passages that are truly parallel.

Parallelisms may be historical, doctrinal, or prophetical. In whatever department of the Sacred

Oracles they occur, they merit particular attention, and are of high importance to the interpreter. They are useful in the study of Biblical history; but in that of the prophecies, and of Scripture doctrine, they are all important. We can do nothing to effect without them.

If any person wishes to understand correctly the Christian system of religion, he must diligently compare the several different passages in which the same doctrine is taught. Those doctrines cannot be accurately ascertained in any other way. No man can prayerfully and candidly study them in this way, without benefit.

The comparison of parallel passages is important, in the interpretation of any work, whether ancient or modern; in our native dialect, or in foreign tongues. But it is most important in respect to ancient works, and those originally written in foreign languages, because they are most likely to be obscure. It is most important of all, in the interpretation of the Bible, because that is the most ancient work in existence, in respect to some of its parts; because it was originally written in ancient and foreign languages; because many of its communications are such as we know nothing at all about, except what we learn from this source; because of its considerable magnitude; and because many of its different portions were given for the express purpose of explaining other remote portions of the same; and of correcting errors respecting them, into which persons had already fallen or were liable to fall.

Parallel passages when compared, reflect light on

each other in various ways. That which is wanting to a perfect understanding of the assertion in one, is found in another ; and that which is wanting to a perfect understanding of the latter, is found in the former ; and so on. So that it may often happen, that two passages would both be incorrectly interpreted, if considered alone, and both be fully and correctly understood, if compared together.

The sentiment that is to us, in our peculiar circumstances, expressed obscurely in one passage, may often by the light of another, relating evidently to the same subject, be made in the highest degree perspicuous.

Parallel passages are useful in explaining each other by reason of something being contained in one which is supplementary to the other. The latter, in consequence of that supplement, is either more definite than the former, or else by reason of this additional element, contributes in some other way to render the other more definite.

The difference may consist in the use of different terms to denote the same idea, in the substitution of a literal for a figurative expression, or of a figurative for a literal one ; in an additional qualifying word, or phrase, or sentence ; in having a relation to a different subordinate or leading subject ; in being made the ground of a peculiar inference, or the subject matter of a peculiar argument. It is in consequence only, of some difference of this kind, that parallel passages mutually illustrate each other.

This difference therefore, ought in each case to be carefully observed, and its relation to what is com-

mon to the passages compared, accurately determined. The first object of comparing parallel passages, is to see wherein they agree, and wherein they differ. Having ascertained their agreement and differences, we apply what is peculiar in the former, to explain the latter, and what is peculiar in the latter, to explain the former.

In comparing parallel passages, the plain must in every case be allowed to explain the obscure; and never the contrary. The error is sometimes committed, of explaining, in an arbitrary manner, an obscure passage, and of wresting those parallel ones which are more plain, from their obvious import, in order to make them correspond with it, thus erroneously interpreted.

As far as the meaning of words can be fully determined by other kinds of evidence, that of parallel passages is unnecessary. To resort to supposed or real parallelisms, for the purpose of wresting words from their plain and obvious import, is unreasonable and impious in the extreme. But it is an impiety not unfrequently committed. It is the favorite device of false teachers, and one by which thousands have been deceived. It is a device which is in successful operation at the present time; and by which not a few are involved in the most absurd and fatal errors.

Great accuracy and caution are requisite in every department of Biblical Interpretation. Conjectural and hasty conclusions ought never to be admitted. But in respect to the comparison of parallel passages, and the inferences we draw from such compar-

isons, we ought to be peculiarly cautious, not to deceive ourselves by arbitrary and conjectural modes of procedure.

In making use of parallelisms to ascertain the meaning of words, we ought (1.) to ascertain that supposed parallelisms are real. Nothing but decicive evidence ought to satisfy us on this point. All those supposed parallelisms which are not supported by such evidence, ought to be rejected. Mere probability is not sufficient for the purposes of interpretation, however strong that probability may be.

(2.) We ought to ascertain to what extent the passages compared are parallel; in other words what ideas common to both, are alike obvious in both, or at least sufficiently so. It is in having some obvious ideas in common, that parallelism consists; and the parallelism thus constituted is greater or less, according to the relative importance and number of those common ideas.

(3.) We ought to ascertain with precision, what is peculiar to each of the parallel passages compared, and whether this peculiarity is in any way definitive of their precise meaning; also, what there is in one which can be in any way supplementary to the other, or explanatory of it.

(4.) We ought to determine the bearing of whatever is peculiar in each, on the other passage; in what respect it makes the meaning of any single word, and of the whole, either more obvious or more determinate. Continued and patient attention is requisite in order to our successful accomplishment of this object.

(5.) We ought to compare as many passages as possible, relating to every doubtful or difficult subject. The concentrated and continued light of many passages, is clearer and stronger than that of only a few. And the true signification of any important word or phrase in Scripture, is that which will be sustained by an examination of every parallel passage, where the subject to which it relates is presented to view, or in any way explained. If we have adopted an interpretation that will not abide the test of an extended comparison of this kind, we may rest assured that we have deceived ourselves.

The leading controversies which have been carried on against the orthodox branches of the Christian church, have been powerfully sustained by a perverted use of this mode of reasoning, and of this source of argument. Many have deceived themselves and others, by assuming the existence of parallelism where it does not exist, and thus reasoning in the determination of the meaning of words, upon premises that are incorrect, and that might, if thoroughly examined, be found to rest on inconclusive arguments.

For example; it is necessary to compare extensively, parallel passages, in order to elicit and establish the Scripture doctrine of the general judgment; or in other words to determine the precise and full meaning of the Scripture language on this subject. This comparison, if thoroughly and faithfully prosecuted, is decisively indicative of the truth. But by a mistake in determining passages to be of this class which are not so, an erroneous conclusion respecting

the Bible doctrine of the final judgment, becomes easy and almost unavoidable. Passages are often decided to be parallel by superficial inquirers on account of mere similarity of expression, when evidence of a similarity of object and design is entirely wanting. In this way those passages which teach the doctrine of the final judgment, are decided to be parallel with those which relate to the infliction of only temporal judgments, and are explained by them in a manner which does the utmost violence to the established principles of human language, reflects the highest discredit upon the Bible itself, and inflicts the greatest injury upon the cause of practical and experimental religion.

The doctrine of the final judgment cannot be legitimately explained away.

The same error has been committed in the interpretation of those portions of the Scriptures, which relate to the future punishment of the wicked. No class of texts are more explicit than these. They are also numerous; and embrace a great variety of expression, both in respect to the literal and figurative announcement of the doctrine which they obviously teach. But by classing them as parallel with other passages relating only to the infliction of temporal punishments, and explaining them according to this classification, many have succeeded in blinding their own minds to the truth, and in deceiving others. Unhappy success! Melancholy perversion both of language and reason!

In both of the above cases, obvious and destructive error has been the result of assuming the existence

of parallelism, without decisive evidence of its existence; a mistake that is wholly unnecessary, though not by any means uncommon. This erroneous judgment being once formed and established, may often lead us to the most forced and unnatural constructions of language, and plunge us into the most revolting absurdities, without opening our eyes to see the fallacy which lies at the foundation of our reasoning.

By a judicious comparison of parallel passages we make the different parts of the Bible explain each other, and the Holy Spirit his own interpreter. We obtain access to sources of evidence which are the most clear and convincing.

The use of parallel passages in detecting erroneous interpretations, may be still further illustrated, by the application of the rule under consideration to those passages of Scripture which are made the basis of the doctrine of Christian perfection.

The controversy respecting Christian perfection, is one that must be settled by determining the meaning of the words and phrases supposed to teach that sentiment.

The doctrine in question is one which relates to Christian character. What is the Bible doctrine respecting Christian character? John says, 1 John, v. 1, and 18, "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God; That whosoever is born of God sinneth not;" so also 1 John, iii. 9; making abstinence from sin, a characteristic of all true believers and Christians. If these passages stood alone, and were not modified either by parallel passages, or

by known truths from any other source, we might interpret them of sinless perfection, or entire abstinence from sin, of any kind or degree. But this is not the case. Their signification is limited and modified, both by parallel passages relating to Christian character, which represent it as imperfect; and also by observation and experience, the observation and experience of the worthiest, most intelligent, and best of men; and of those who afford the strongest evidence of having experienced a change of heart.

Of the parallel passages which may be referred to, for the purpose of determining in what sense the phrase "sinneth not," in 1 John, v. 18, is to be understood, the following are obvious and decisive. Phil. iii. 12. "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect;" also, verses 13, 14, and 15, of the same. Job, xl. 4, xlii. 6, "Behold I am vile; I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes;" compared with Job, i. 1, xlii. 7, "That man was perfect and upright. Ye have not spoken of me the thing which is right, as my servant Job hath."

If Paul was not yet absolutely perfect, after having been forty years in the service of Christ, not merely as an ordinary Christian, but as a wise master builder; if Job, though declared to be a perfect and upright man, could say with truth, "Behold, I am vile; I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes;" then the abstinence from sin denoted by "sinneth not," as descriptive of a regenerate state, is not absolute, but relative. The regenerate are all righteous; they practice entire abstinence from all known

sin. But they are not all absolutely perfect, as the Scriptures and experience strongly testify.

Sec. 6. Rules for determining when words are used in a tropical or figurative sense.

Tropical or figurative language is common to every department of literature, and contributes essentially to beauty and force of expression, as well as to variety. Some writers however, use it sparingly, and others with the greatest freedom. It is the life of poetry, and one of the indispensable elements of powerful and impassioned oratory. The literal use of words is not sufficiently expressive, to serve as a medium for the communication of deep and excited feeling. The mind naturally gives them higher senses, to suit the degree and nature of its excitement, and by this means infuses into discourse, a degree of ardor and energy, which it would otherwise be totally incapable of expressing.

The words of the Bible are designed to be expressive of feeling, in all its varieties. Many portions of the Sacred Oracles were written under the greatest possible excitement, and are themselves of the most exciting character. It was therefore necessary that the most powerful modes of speech should be adopted in those writings. This we find to have been done with the happiest effect. The Bible is the greatest and noblest repository of figurative language that the world contains. The interpreter of it therefore, ought to be well acquainted with all the leading principles and rules which relate to figurative modes of speech. As a prerequisite to

the interpretation of a passage, it is sometimes necessary to determine whether any part is figurative or not; and how far it is to be considered as sustaining this character. This problem is sometimes a matter of considerable difficulty. The following rules may be of service in determining it.

1. *Necessity.* In the interpretation of language, the literal meaning of words ought never to be departed from, without evident reason and necessity. To explain words in a tropical or figurative sense, because they are sometimes, or even frequently used so, is in any case entirely unauthorized. It is an entire departure from the established principles of language, and a gross perversion of reason.

No intelligent writer departs from the literal signification of words, without giving unequivocal indications of the fact. In the absence of decisive evidence, that a word is used in a tropical or figurative sense, we have no right to suppose this is the case; but have reason to believe the contrary.

The fact that a word will admit of being interpreted figuratively, and yet express in our apprehension, a consistent sense, is not a sufficient reason for interpreting it so. It ought not to admit of a different interpretation, without doing evident violence to the context, in order to establish its claim to a tropical or figurative sense.

Such is always the case with words that are really figurative. They cannot, without inconsistency, be interpreted in their literal senses. Those senses therefore, ought not to be forced upon them.

2. *Incongruity.* What constitutes a necessity for

departing, in our interpretation of language, from the literal and established meaning of words, and explaining them in tropical significations, is a manifest incongruity between the subject and attribute, or the apparent subject, and what is asserted respecting the real one.

This occurs wherever words which are the appropriate and known symbols of one class of objects and relations, are applied to denote those of another. For example; Christ is the true vine; the living bread; the lamb of God. Here the names of inanimate objects are applied to designate Christ, an animate one. Considered in respect to their literal senses, there is a manifest incongruity between the words which enter into these assertions; but interpreted figuratively, their meaning is plain and consistent.

In accordance with this rule, whenever words appropriated to corporeal objects, are applied to incorporeal ones, or those appropriated to animate objects, are applied to inanimate, or those appropriated to rational objects, are applied to irrational, &c. or the contrary, of these several cases, and of others like them; the words so applied, are always to be understood as tropical. The Lord is my rock, my fortress; burning wrath, fiery indignation, raging tempest, roaring ocean, smiling spring, are examples to which this rule manifestly applies, and by which, as by a multitude of analogous ones, to be met with on all sides, it is fully illustrated.

The faithful and judicious application of this rule

would correct many hurtful errors, in the interpretation of the tropical language of the Bible.

3. *A definitive clause.* When the tropical sense of a word or phrase, is not indicated by other means, this is often done by the use of a definitive clause, showing both that the literal sense is not intended, and making a tropical interpretation necessary. The Bible abounds in examples of this kind; of which, yoke of bondage; being dead in sin; being born of the Spirit, are a specimen. In each of these cases, the explanatory clause requires the word to which it relates, to be interpreted, not in a literal, but in a tropical sense.

4. *Literal disagreement of parallel passages.* The Bible presents to our consideration many subjects that are entirely removed from the sphere of human observation, and also from that of the senses. Our knowledge of the nature and attributes of those subjects, must depend entirely upon an interpretation of the language by which they are described. When such a subject is set forth by the use of terms of entirely and manifestly different and incongruous meanings, we may conclude with certainty, that some of those terms are to be interpreted in tropical senses. This rule is applicable to those Scripture representations, which have respect to the change that takes place in the human soul, on our becoming pious. It is expressed in Scripture by terms of different and incongruous import. Being born again; being born of water, and of the Spirit; being created anew; being sanctified; becoming united to

Christ; repenting and being converted; are some of the terms by which this change is indicated.

The application of them to denote the same thing, cannot be justified on any other supposition than that some of them are used in tropical senses. They cannot be harmoniously explained on any other principle. On this principle the explanation of them is easy and natural, and their signification both consistent and obvious.

5. *Literal agreement of parallel passages.* In those cases where the same words, or those of similar import are in different parallel passages uniformly used to designate the same subject, and are otherwise unexplained, we may confidently infer that they ought to be interpreted literally. Those passages of Scripture which relate to the future and eternal punishment of the wicked, are of this class. That part of the Divine procedure is represented by various terms and modes of expression, all of which unequivocally denote suffering, from which we infer, with confidence, that real suffering is intended, and that literal punishment will be inflicted on all the finally impenitent.

The doctrine of the resurrection of the body, stands on a similar foundation. It is referred to in various passages of Scripture, and by various modes of expression, all of which indicate the same thing, and agree in expressing substantially the same literal sense. Thus the resurrection of the dead; of the body; being quickened or made alive, &c. are expressions in constant Scriptural use, in reference to a future and important event, which, we conclude

from this uniformity of expression in relation to it, can be nothing less than a literal resurrection of the bodies of all the dead.

This rule is an important barrier, operating in conjunction with other principles of language, to check the undue extention of tropical interpretations. In reference to subjects concerning which we have opportunities of accurate information from other sources, there is not much room for an undue extension of tropical interpretations. The subject itself, in such cases, contributes to define the language used respecting it. But where there are no other sources of satisfactory information, a principle of this kind is necessary to facilitate correct decisions respecting the mode of interpretation proper to be adopted.

SEC. 7. RULES FOR DETERMINING THE SENSE OF TROPICAL OR FIGURATIVE WORDS.

Tropical language is constructed on the same principles as that which is strictly literal. Consequently the methods of determining the sense of tropical words, are substantially the same as those which have been pointed out. We have not one set of rules for determining the literal sense of words, and another entirely different, for the determination of their tropical senses; but we have, for the most part, what is far better, one set of rules applicable to the determination of the sense of words in both cases.

The peculiar difficulties however, which sometimes attend the application of these rules to tropic-

al language, and the frequent errors that are committed in this department of Interpretation, seem to indicate the propriety of a few remarks, particularly on this subject, with a view to facilitate the application of principles which have been for the most part already explained.

1. *The peculiar character of the tropical expressions.* The different classes of tropical words, ought to be interpreted according to their respective characters. Metaphors ought to be interpreted as metaphors, in a metaphorical sense; allegories, as allegories, in an allegorical sense; hyperbole and irony, with due consideration of the nature of those modes of speech. Each of these classes of words have a true sense, that is indicated by the nature of the class to which it belongs.

In order to the due observance of this rule, it is necessary carefully to distinguish figurative language from that which is literal, and also the different classes of figurative expressions from each other Such discrimination is not always necessary, but it is always useful in promoting clearness and accuracy of perception, and is sometimes indispensable to the correct interpretation of figurative language.

2. *Established and known usage.* Established usage, both general and particular, is a certain rule by which to determine the meaning of tropical words. Where this is known, and in the absence of internal evidence to the contrary, it is always to be observed. General usage is the first and highest rule. When that is uniform, and not modified or contradicted by a known particular usage, or by internal

evidence, it is a clear and certain indication of the sense intended. When a known particular usage supervenes, as belonging uniformly to the subject treated of, or to the author whose treatise we are investigating, that takes the place of general usage, and is equally decisive of the sense intended.

General usage in respect to the tropical sense of words, is remarkably uniform with all good writers. It is capable of being accurately known to an extent which, to the superficial inquirer, is altogether incredible. Being known, it sheds a degree of light on this department of Interpretation, which renders it generally perspicuous and satisfactory to the diligent and attentive inquirer.

The sacred writers, though distinguished by several important and obvious peculiarities, still have many equally important and known points of resemblance to others, in respect to the use of tropical language. Besides, they are peculiarly harmonious in this respect, among themselves. The later writers having in every case an intimate acquaintance with the writings of those who preceded them, adopted the same modes of expression, and, to a great extent, the same peculiarities of style. This circumstance contributes essentially to the perspicuity of the Sacred Oracles generally, but particularly so in respect to those parts of the Bible that are of a tropical or figurative character.

The same words are generally used in the same tropical senses, by different sacred writers, from the earliest to the latest. Each successive sacred wri-

ter seems in this respect to approbate the usages of his predecessors, and conform to them.

The same word not unfrequently has different tropical significations, equally well established, and of frequent occurrence in the language of the same writer, as well as in that of different writers.

Light, for example, is frequently used metaphorically by the sacred writers, to denote, (1,) happiness and prosperity; (2,) glory and honor; (3,) truth; (4,) knowledge; (5,) piety and virtue.

Darkness is a Scriptural metaphor, which denotes, (1,) misery, adversity; (2,) ignorance, error; (3,) sin, impurity.

Fire is a Scriptural metaphor, which denotes, (1,) holiness, justice; (2,) the author or cause of purification, of moral renovation and improvement of character; (3,) the author or cause of misery or adversity; (4,) misery or adversity however produced; (5,) the miseries of hell.

When a word has different established metaphorical significations, it often requires careful attention and study, to determine which is intended. Serious mistakes in this department of Interpretation, are of frequent occurrence. In all such cases, other principles besides general usage, must be referred to, for a decision respecting the true meaning expressed in each particular case.

3. *Other subsidiary and general principles of tropical Interpretation.* Where the general meaning of a metaphor or other tropical word is unknown, or where the same expression has more than one established meaning, its signification in any particular

case, must be defined by some other of the known principles of language. Such explanation is required of every good writer; and is seldom sought in vain, by the attentive and intelligent reader. These subsidiary principles of Interpretation comprehend (1,) logical definitions by the use of synonymous terms, or otherwise; (2,) the known nature of the subject treated of; (3,) the obvious purpose and design of the writer; (4,) the position of the tropical expression in the sentence or paragraph; (5,) the context; (6,) examples of the thing signified; (7,) comparisons by which the sense is illustrated; (8,) antithetical clauses; (9,) parallel passages.

All these are of occasional, and some of them of frequent use, in the interpretation of the tropical language of the Holy Scriptures.

The known nature of the subject to which the tropical word relates, the context, and a comparison of parallel passages, ought never to be neglected, in determining the sense of tropical words. They exert a principal, and almost universal agency, in making language generally, and this no less than other modes of speech, of a determinate character. Precision and accuracy cannot be given to our expressions by any other means, to the exclusion of these. They are the universal auxiliaries of the interpreter, and indications of the true sense of words that accompany human discourse, in all its varieties, and through all its windings.

4. *A substitution of equivalent literal, for figurative expressions.* We often suppose ourselves to be in possession of the true sense of tropical expressions,

when this is not the case. The endeavor therefore, to substitute equivalent literal expressions, in the place of those which are figurative, is useful in several respects; (1,) as a means of indicating to ourselves how far we attach any definite sense to the expression in question; (2,) as a means of facilitating the comparison of the sense in which we understand a given figurative expression, with what we know of any established usage in respect to the case; the known nature of the subject, the obvious purpose and design of the writer, or whatever other principle may legitimately apply.

The following attempts to convert figurative into literal expressions of similar import, may serve the purpose of illustrating this rule, and of indicating to those who are unexperienced in this exercise, something of its importance.

"I am the vine, ye are the branches." John xv. 5; literally, I am related to you as the vine is related to its branches; that is, by an intimate and vital relation.

"This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." Here are several tropical expressions blended together. Condemnation denotes by metonymy, the cause of condemnation. Light is used metaphorically, to denote religious knowledge or instruction. Darkness is also a metaphor, the antithesis of light, and signifying the opposite; namely, corrupt religious sentiment or belief, ignorance and error.

Translated into literal expressions, as here explain-

ed, the passage would read; This is the cause of condemnation, that religious knowledge is come into the world, and men loved error rather than knowledge, because their deeds were evil.

In substitutions of this kind, it will generally be found difficult to equal the energy and expressiveness of the figurative representation. Figurative language, whenever correctly used, is more expressive than any literal expressions of the same signification. Its superiority is often strikingly evinced by an endeavor to form literal expressions equally significant of the same ideas. But though there are many cases in which the sense of tropical expressions cannot be fully indicated by any corresponding literal announcement of the same, there may, in every case that is correctly and perfectly understood, be a substitution, that shall be sufficiently exact, to verify the interpretation.

Sec. 8. Rules for determining the signification of allegories.

The application of allegories to purposes of instruction and argument, has been extensively practiced both by the sacred writers and by others. Several beautiful allegories occur in the Old Testament. In the discourses of our Savior they abound. The allegories of the Bible are of unparalleled beauty and excellence. They contribute much to enhance the value of the Sacred Oracles, and to increase the energy and beauty of those portions of Scripture in which they occur, and of those exhibitions of truth to which they belong.

Allegorical illustrations are peculiarly adapted to encounter prejudice and perverse opposition of feeling, and are generally resorted to for that purpose in the Scriptures.

Our Savior discoursed much to his numerous and miscellaneous auditors, in parables. The reason of his doing this, was, that the perceptions of the people were so dull, and their prejudices against evangelical truth, and their perverseness of heart so great, that they could not have been so effectually reached and instructed, in any other way. He did not speak in parables for the purpose of concealing the truth from his hearers, but for that of making his revelation of it effectual, in the highest possible degree. This mode of instruction is adapted to the weakest capacities. It is peculiarly suited to the ignorant, the stupid, and unreasonable.

For the considerate, discerning, and unprejudiced, it is not particularly necessary. They are prepared to receive instruction by the more direct and simple modes of presentation; and in dealing with them, such modes have been adopted by God, as they generally are by men.

Allegories, however, are not without their uses to all. This is particularly true of those contained in the Bible. They are adapted to attract the attention and inform the mind of the wayfaring man, though a fool, and also to administer to the improvement of the purest, loftiest, and most cultivated minds.

The general rules for determining the sense of words, apply equally to allegorical representations. In its internal structure, an allegory does not differ

essentially from any other narrative; and its literal sense is to be determined by the same rules as that of any other species of narratives. But the facts which constitute an allegorical representation, have a higher and analogical meaning, which is the appropriate signification of the allegory, as such. Every word in the allegory may be rightly interpreted, and not a glimpse of this be obtained.

1. In the interpretation of allegories, the first thing to be done, is to ascertain the purpose or design with which they were spoken. A knowledge of the purpose and design of any discourse, is often of great use in assisting our apprehension of its true sense. But it is particularly important in the interpretation of allegories. Any further than we can ascertain the design of an allegory, it is impossible that we should understand it.

The design of the allegories of the Bible, is generally indicated unequivocally in the context. Sometimes it is directly asserted, and sometimes evinced by indirect and circumstantial evidence.

To interpret an allegory without any regard to its design as indicated in the context, and inconsistently with that design, is to act in a most arbitrary manner. Such interpretations are utterly fanciful, and universally erroneous. A Scripture allegory sustains a relation to some subject pointed out in the context, or by other means, similar to that of an argument to a proposition, which it is designed to prove or enforce. The two are joined together by a tie that cannot be sundered, in our apprehensions, without producing obscurity. Such is the relation

of a Scripture allegory to some particular subject, which it is designed to illustrate, that it must be contemplated in its relation to that subject, in order to be understood.

2. The different and prominent parts of an allegory ought to be explained in accordance with the main design. In most cases the Scripture allegories are introduced to illustrate a subject in some particular aspect, or in reference to some particular point. The illustration of that point is the main design, and the whole allegory is constructed with a view to the most successful accomplishment of that object. For example; the parable of the prodigal son, and some others, were spoken to silence the clamors of the scribes and Pharisees against Christ, because he received the company of sinners, and associated condescendingly and kindly with them. Luke xv. 1. 2. The direct object of it was to illustrate the condescension and kindness of God in respect to all that repent of their sins, and engage heartily in the performance of their religious duties.

The parable of the good Samaritan, Luke x. 30–35, was spoken to illustrate the duty of universal kindness and well doing. The prominent parts of both these parables ought to be interpreted in correspondence with the purposes they were respectively designed to answer. The same is equally true of all allegorical representations. Considered in respect to the main design for which they are introduced, every allegory ought to be interpreted as a whole, and not merely as a collection of independent illustrations.

3. As the allegory is founded on resemblance, a perception of those qualities which are common both to the subject of the narrative, considered as a narrative, and to that designed to be illustrated by it, is necessary to a right understanding of the allegory.

In determining the points of resemblance in an allegory, we have need of great caution, not to multiply them too much; nor to diminish them too much; nor to substitute erroneous ones in the place of those which are true and real. No two objects, even of the some class, resemble each other in every particular. Still less is this the fact, in respect to objects of different classes. Material and temporal objects and relations, have some points of resemblance to those which are spiritual and eternal. These points may be obvious and striking. They often are. But the resemblance is in no case perfect. While there may be ten points of agreement, and ten qualities in common between a particular temporal and spiritual object, there are perhaps as many more, in which they disagree, and by which they differ from each other.

The subject and circumstances of an allegory are justly supposed to have some things in common with the related subject and circumstances intended to be illustrated by it. These common properties constitute resemblance. What they are, we ought to ascertain with as much precision as possible.

Multiplying supposed points of resemblance, in cases of this kind, is a common fault, and is generally and correctly termed, pressing the analogy too far.

4. The foregoing rules for the interpretation of allegories, may be illustrated by the following example. Luke xviii. 2—8.

"There was in a city, a judge which feared not God, neither regarded man. And there was a widow in that city, and she came unto him, saying, avenge me of mine adversary. And he would not, for a while, but afterward he said within himself, though I fear not God, nor regard man, yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming, she weary me. And the Lord said, hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge his own elect that cry day and night to him, though he bear long with them? I tell you he will avenge them speedily."

(1.) As to the design or purpose of this parable.

This is explicitly asserted in the context; "That men ought always to pray, and not to faint."

(2,) As to the relation of the prominent parts of the allegorical narrative to the main design.

The poor widow, asking redress of a judge or governor, represents a sinner asking favors of God. Both are alike helpless, needy and dependent.

The success of the widow's importunity, represents that of sinners in importunate prayer to God. It is manifestly designed to encourage men to be both importunate and believing, in their cries to God for mercy and protection.

The fact that the judge was unjust, neither fearing God nor regarding man, renders the case peculiarly strong and encouraging. If being of such a character, he could be induced to yield to the impor-

tunity of a feeble and defenseless widow, whom he cared nothing about, how much more will a just and gracious God, who cherishes a tender and fatherly care of all his creatures, listen to the unceasing cries of his own children, and grant all their reasonable requests.

(3.) This parable is an instance in which the analogy between the allegorical narration, and the things represented by it, holds only to a manifestly limited extent. The design of the parable, and the nature of the subject illustrated by it, indicate with sufficient clearness, what the points of resemblance are. The judge represents God, in respect to authority and power, but not in respect to personal character. His yielding to the importunity of the widow, corresponds to God's yielding to the importunate cries of his children, in respect to the bestowment of the thing desired, but not in respect to the reason of its bestowment. The judge complied with the widow's request to avoid trouble, God answers the prayers of his children to do them good.

CHAPTER III.

SUBSIDIARY AND PARTICULAR LAWS OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION.

SEC. 1. THE INTERPRETATION OF THE SCRIPTURAL SYSTEM OF DOCTRINES.

THE word doctrine is derived from a word which signifies to teach; and denotes whatever is communicated as an article of faith. In its most comprehensive sense, it embraces both truth and error, and is nearly synonymous with opinion. Thus we speak of the doctrines of Plato, of Aristotle, of Confucius, and of Mohammed, as well as of the doctrines of Christ, and of true religion.

This word however, is generally used in a more restricted sense, to denote the Biblical system of religious and moral truth. In this sense the word doctrine is synonymous with religious belief, or religious sentiment; and is discriminated from historical or prophetical announcements, considered merely as such. Whatever is taught in the Bible, on religious and moral subjects, properly belongs to its doctrines. To exhibit and enforce these, is the great object for which the Bible was given. From these, it derives its principal value; and by means of them, works those mighty transformations of character, by which sinners are converted, and prepared for heaven.

The religious doctrines of the Bible comprehend

all those sentiments and opinions which are there inculcated, respecting the subject of religion; a vast collection of revealed truth. Biblical Interpretation embraces of course, the investigation of all those passages, in which religious truth is contained. A right interpretation of those passages is all that we want to put us in possession of the doctrines they communicate. Correct interpretation therefore, is the avenue to correct religious doctrine.

No man studies the Bible in a right manner, who does not study it with a special view to ascertain its doctrines. If we understand the doctrines of the Bible, we understand the Bible; otherwise not. Every new doctrine we learn is a substantial and valuable addition to our Biblical knowledge. All have something to learn in this department of truth. The field of Scripture doctrine is of almost unlimited extent. It has never yet been fully explored by any human mind. It probably never will be in this world.

The only proper method of determining what the doctrines of the Bible are, is by interpretation. They cannot be guessed out. Human invention is not adequate to the task of discovering them by the dim light of natural reason. By the laws of Interpretation they can be determined with accuracy and precision. Let these laws, as far as they have already been explained, be faithfully applied, and the great body of Christian doctrine will be clearly developed. As the subject of doctrinal interpretation however, is one of peculiar interest, and in some respects of peculiar difficulty, it may not be unprofitable to illus-

trate the following additional principles of Doctrinal Interpretation.

1. *Observation and experience.* As far as the Scriptures relate to subjects which come within the sphere of our personal observation, we ought to study those subjects directly in connexion with the Scripture doctrines which relate to them. We ought to study facts as they present themselves to our personal observation, in connexion with the inspired expositions of them.

The doctrines of the Bible concerning human depravity, regeneration by the Holy Spirit, the progressive sanctification of believers, &c. are of this class. They are all matters of experience and observation. The material facts in respect to each of them, belong to real life, as truly as they do to the doctrinal announcements of the Scriptures.

The doctrinal views communicated in the Bible, were intended to be understood and explained according to all the obvious facts to be met with in human observation and experience, relating to the same subjects.

In giving us the light of revelation, God never designed to supercede that of human observation and experience. His instructions are supplementary to those of perception and reason. Observation and enlightened reason are necessary to an understanding of all the higher doctrines of Divine revelation, relating to their appropriate objects.

Facts that come within the sphere of human observation, are the natural interpreters of all inspired

communications, to the subjects of which they relate.

Many Scripture doctrines relate so directly to those states of mind which are matters of human consciousness, that they cannot be fully understood without becoming matters of experience. This occurs in conformity with a general principle of human language.

All the elements of human knowledge, have their appropriate channels of access to the mind, and are incapable of being attained by any other means. Colors must be viewed by the eye, sound appreciated by the ear, and all the elementary feelings and states of mind, ascertained by consciousness. Consequently those Scripture doctrines which relate to the objects of human consciousness, must be interpreted experimentally, in order to be interpreted aright.

A blind man may as well theorize about colors, or a deaf man respecting sound, as any man interpret the Scripture expositions relative to peculiar elementary states of mind, who has not experienced in some degree, the same. The attempt to determine accurately the subjects of human consciousness, without the aid of experience in respect to them is utterly puerile and absurd.

The interpreter of those portions of Scripture, which relate to experimental religion, must be acquainted experimentally with his subject, in order to understand it. The necessity of piety in the interpreter, in order to his understanding aright, many parts of the Scriptures, is asserted in John vii. 17, where Christ, after having declared that his doctrine

is from God, proceeds to say that, If any man will do God's will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be Divine or not. To the same import is John viii. 47. "He that is of God, heareth God's words; ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God." Also 1 Cor. ii. 14, 15. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, for they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual judgeth all things; yet he himself is judged of no man." That is, his character is fully understood by no man who is not pious, and consequently not spiritual.

2. *The agency of the Holy Spirit.* Intimately connected with observation and experience, is the agency of the Holy Spirit, in promoting the development of Scripture doctrine. Holy men of old spake, in the communication of Divine truth, as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. 2 Peter i. 21. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God;" 2 Tim. iii. 16; and is on this account chiefly profitable for doctrine. The doctrines of the Bible being communicated under the influence and direction of the Holy Ghost, it is not strange that a similar Divine agency should be necessary to a right understanding of many of them.

This is undoubtedly the fact; and is in full accordance with the dictates of enlightened reason, as well as supported by the clearest Scripture evidence. In human productions, there must be to some extent a common sympathy between the writer and reader, in order that the former may be fully understood and

duly appreciated. It is therefore not strange or anomalous, that the same is true in respect to the productions of the inspired writers.

Christ promised the Holy Ghost to his disciples, to teach them all things. John xiv. 26. He declared that this invisible and Divine agent, should "reprove the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment."

Paul says, Romans viii. 14, "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." Also 1 Cor. ii. 12, "We have received the Spirit which is of God, that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God." In the last quotation, the reception of the Spirit by the Corinthian Christians, is represented expressly as being in order to a more extensive knowledge than they could otherwise attain. On the same principle, John says to Christians generally, 1 John ii. 20, 27, "Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things. The same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth." Other Scripture testimonies, of similar import, might be adduced, but these are sufficient, and establish beyond reasonable controversy, the fact in question; that the special agency of the Holy Spirit is necessary to a competent knowledge of Scripture doctrine.

The method by which the agency of the Spirit conduces to a right understanding of his own written word, has been an object of much prayerful inquiry with the pious, and the subject of some erroneous impressions among the uninformed. This is not effected by the instrumentality of dreams and vis-

ions, or by direct supernatural inspiration, of any kind. It results from that convicting and sanctifying influence, whereby the appropriate and specific fruits of the Spirit are produced within us. These fruits are enumerated in Gal. v. 22, 23. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." The Spirit therefore, does not communicate Divine truth by a special revelation, but by rendering us spiritual; by endowing us with His graces, and promoting our experience of those states of mind, to which many Scriptural doctrines relate. In this method, He does operate effectually to promote our knowledge of Scripture doctrine. Without these operations many degrees of doctrinal knowledge would be utterly unattainable, that are now acquired by the pious with great facility, and to great advantage.

The agency of the Holy Spirit in promoting doctrinal knowledge, renders prayer for His illuminating influences, a peculiarly important accompaniment of all correct study of Scripture doctrine. We can do nothing to effect without it.

3. *Abstinence from known sin.* Sin contributes to blunt our moral and religious sensibilities. It impairs our capacities of religious and moral perception.

The effect of sin in impairing our capacities for the successful investigation of moral and religious subjects, is strikingly exemplified in the case of the drunkard and sensualist. The vices of these persons manifestly obscure their intellectual and moral vis-

ion. Much that is plain to others, is totally concealed from them; or else is apprehended with the greatest difficulty, and in a most imperfect manner.

To teach the ignorant drunkard and sensualist, yet continuing in their vices, the pure morality of the gospel, and give them a minute and accurate knowledge of it, is impossible. We might as easily teach the blind to see, and the deaf to hear. The great degree of incapacity for the apprehension of moral and religious truth, which characterizes the obdurate drunkard and sensualist, is the natural result of continuance in these sins. Individual acts of immorality, do not always produce an appreciable effect of this kind; but a continued repetition of such acts is attended with a hardening and deadening effect on the mind, that is obvious to every observer. In this disastrous effect, we recognize the result of combined influence, the influence of many individual acts of sin. Each of these acts, we have reason to believe, contributed its share, often imperceptible, to the aggregate of moral injury in which all result; an aggregate which no reasonable person can contemplate without horror.

Impiety, even in the absence of gross immoralities, as well as in connexion with them, exerts a powerful influence in excluding the light of religious truth from our minds. Selfishness, pride, envy, injustice, and every other state of mind, in which we deviate from the pure precepts of our holy religion, exert a manifest and appalling influence of this kind. If we indulge any of them, or of their kindred depravities, we do it at the expense of being thus hardened

and blinded, in addition to incurring all their other attendant and consequent evils.

The obstacles to the attainment of accurate doctrinal knowledge, presented by immorality and impiety, are utterly insuperable. No man can fully overcome them, without ceasing to be either immoral or irreligious.

They render even honest inquiry often fruitless and unavailing; and in respect to the multitude who are not disposed to be even honest in their pursuit of doctrinal knowledge, they are the cause of numerous errors, the most absurd and pernicious.

The immorality and impiety of the ungodly, are the greatest obstacles to be encountered in their religious instruction by others. While these principles continue to maintain an ascendancy in the human heart, they set argument and persuasion at defiance. Not till they are expelled, will truth be able effectually to enter and take entire possession of the soul. The expulsion of these will be followed by the admission of new and unexpected light on religious subjects. Those therefore, who wish to be illuminated with the light of religious doctrine, must renounce those deeds of darkness and depravity which impede such illumination.

4. *Doctrinal passages of an obvious and certain import.* Some Scripture doctrines are revealed with the utmost clearness and precision. They are obvious to every enlightened and candid reader of the Bible. All such ought to be received with the utmost confidence, and other passages relating to the same subjects, that are ambiguous or obscure, ought

to be interpreted in conformity with these; not inconsistently with them.

This rule is founded on the obvious principles of human language. We never express ourselves clearly and strongly, without wishing to be understood according to the proper and obvious meaning of our words. Whenever we use expressions that are ambiguous or obscure, in connexion with those that are plain and obvious; we expect the plain to be interpreted, and believed, and made use of, if need be, in the exposition of what is not plain; never the contrary. Besides, whenever a subject has once been fully explained, it may be presumed to be understood. Acting on this presumption, we do not use language in respect to such a subject, with so much precision; neither do we, in all cases, make choice of expressions so easily understood, as would otherwise be necessary. The obscure is to a certain extent made obvious by the plain, and as far as this is the case, answers perfectly all the purposes of language.

The application of this rule, in the doctrinal interpretation of the Bible, is of the highest importance. The rule is indispensably necessary. The refusal to make use of it, can be the result only of great ignorance, or else of great perverseness. Manifest violations of it, are not acts of legitimate interpretation, but injurious perversions of Divine truth.

For example; the doctrine of the necessity of faith in Christ, exercised in this life, in order to the attainment of salvation, is clearly stated, and the statement of it in the most unequivocal terms, often

repeated in the New Testament. "He that believeth and is baptized," we are told, "shall be saved; and he that believeth not, shall be damned." Other passages of like, and like obvious import, are numerous in the New Testament. This salvation by faith is required to be published to every creature, and all, every where, are commanded to repent and embrace the gospel.

In other places we are told, that Christ tasted death for every man, that God is the Savior of all men, especially of those that believe, 1 Tim. iv. 10. &c. These latter passages are manifestly ambiguous or indefinite. They assert the general fact, that Christ died for all men. But in what sense he died for them all, they do not specify. Considered irrespective of other passages of Scripture relating to this subject, it would be impossible to determine with certainty, whether he died to save all men unconditionally and absolutely, or to place them in circumstances in which they can all obtain salvation by complying with specific and reasonable conditions.

The Scripture doctrine of the necessity of faith to the attainment of salvation, shows indubitably, that the former is not intended in this case, but obviously the latter.

5. *Ecclesiastical history.* History is one of the most extensive and valuable fields of human knowledge. The historical portions of the Bible, reflect much light on its doctrinal ones. The doctrinal history of the church, since the canon of Scripture was completed, forms one of the most interesting departments of religious investigation and inquiry. It de-

serves to be studied by every one who has the means of prosecuting this study. These means are abundant, and cheap enough to be placed, to some extent, within the reach of all intelligent readers of the English language. Perfect ignorance in respect to this subject, is probably not uncommon with intelligent persons, but it is unnecessary.

In all the more important controversies respecting doctrinal interpretation, a recurrence to ecclesiastical history, is of use. It is not often necessary to establish any of the fundamental articles of the Christian faith. They may all be ascertained and established by more direct means. But it is useful for the confirmation even of these; and for the more perfect elucidation of some doctrinal subjects of much interest, that would be otherwise obscure.

Many subjects that are imperfectly explained in the Bible, were doubtless more fully expounded in the oral instructions of the apostles and of other inspired teachers. Some Scriptural modes of expression that are obscure or ambiguous now, were formerly free from either obscurity or ambiguity. In regard to all such subjects and modes of expression, the evidence of ecclesiastical history, when clear and explicit, is of great importance.

We know that the primitive Christian churches were instructed in the true doctrines of the Christian religion, and that they received those doctrines as articles of a common faith. We cannot reasonably suppose that any considerable portion of those churches planted by the apostles, became essentially corrupt, in respect to Christian doctrine, immedi-

ately after the voice of inspiration had ceased. The truth which had been taught with such demonstration of the Spirit, and with power, could not be lost at once, by the great body of the Christian world. Errors might be expected gradually to creep in, and impair the symmetry, and deface the beauty of the Christian system; but the substantial elements and leading outlines of Divine truth, would long retain their hold, and maintain their high standing in the favor of the people of God.

From a knowledge of the sentiments and usages of the early Christian churches, we may derive valuable assistance, in determining some of the sentiments and usages of the apostles, which are not definitely and expressly asserted in the New Testament.

Facts however ascertained, are a safe rule of interpretation, in respect to language which relates to them. They are not to be denied, or softened down, and explained away, for the purpose of making them consistent with language; but language is to be so interpreted as to make it correspond to facts, and consistent with them. When correctly used, it is capable of such interpretation. Agreeably to this principle, historical facts indicate unequivocally, the right method of interpreting some parts of the Bible, which might, in the neglect of these, be peculiarly liable to be either unnoticed or misapprehended. The historical facts relative to the observance of the Christian Sabbath, in the ages immediately subsequent to that of the apostles, are of this description. Independently of the Bible, we learn from authentic

history, that the first day of the week was observed by the primitive Christians, as a Sabbath, a day of religious worship.

The churches planted in different countries and by different apostles, concurred in this observance. It is utterly improbable, that they would have done so, had not the institution in question been one of the primary institutions of the Christian church, and a matter of express apostolic precept. From the fact, therefore, of the general observance of the Christian Sabbath, in the early ages of the church, we infer with confidence, that it must have been enjoined by the apostles. This fact being ascertained, contributes to illustrate some passages of Scripture, that would otherwise be liable to misapprehension, or the full meaning of which, would be liable to be overlooked. The first day of the week is mentioned in the New Testament, as a day of religious worship; Acts ii. 1. xx. 7; John xx. 19, 26; 1 Cor. xvi. 1, 2; Rev. i. 10. Benevolent contributions were extensively enjoined by Paul, to be taken up, or set apart on that day. It is called the Lord's day, in distinction from all others. But in the interpretation of Rev. i. 10, where the term Lord's day occurs, the question immediately arises, in what sense can the first day of the week, or any day, be peculiarly the Lord's day; for in a general sense, all days are his. It can be the Lord's day in no other sense, as far as we can see, than as a day of religious worship, a sabbath. We might arrive safely and confidently at a right conclusion, in respect to the Christian sabbath, without any aid from ecclesiastical history. But

by this additional light, we are happily confirmed and strengthened in our belief, that this is an institution of apostolic origin, and of Divine authority. Multitudes whose study of the Scriptures has not been sufficiently thorough to give them the full force of the Scriptural argument, standing alone, are put in full and easy possession of the truth, by means of the historical light thrown on this subject from other sources.

The propriety of resorting to ecclesiastical history, for a discovery and confirmation of the doctrinal system of the New Testament, is obvious to all enlightened minds. This course is generally pursued in the interpretation of human productions, which have come down to us from antiquity; and it is capable of being pursued both in respect to them, and in respect to the Bible, with the happiest results.

By resorting to ecclesiastical history for information in respect to Christian doctrine, we do not assume that the Bible is unnecessarily obscure, or defective in the extent of its information. We claim for it the greatest possible perfection in every respect. But perfect and complete as its disclosures are, they are subject to the laws of language; and are liable through ignorance, inattention, and prejudice, to be misunderstood and perverted. It does undoubtedly sometimes happen, that the light of history if clearly perceived, is calculated to save us fom doctrinal errors, when we should otherwise fall into them. If this source of information on doctrinal subjects was more thoroughly and generally investigated, its salutary contributions in the promotion

of the cause of truth, would doubtless be greatly increased.

To assume, as some have inconsiderately done, that a knowledge of ecclesiastical history can be of use in facilitating the successful study of Biblical doctrine, is to contradict reason and experience. All the sources of information, on religious subjects, are useful. By the diligent improvement of all, the greatest amount of knowledge may be attained. Our methods of study are often defective. We may approach the truth by one means of information, without success, when by taking advantage of another, we should be sure of being rewarded for our pains, with substantial additions to our knowledge.

Articles of faith may be capable of being fully established by Scriptural evidence alone, and yet not be so established to our minds. Cases of this kind are numerous and important; and where they relate to subjects on which the light of ecclesiastical history is shed, they ought to be studied in that light.

All truth is consistent with itself. No fact, or series of facts in history, when rightly and fully understood, can be incompatible with any doctrinal truth. Even where history can afford us no assistance in decyphering the doctrines Scripture, it can, if prop erly used, do us no injury. As far as it speaks at all, its voice is in harmony with that of the Spirit.

In bringing ecclesiastical history to our aid, in Biblical Interpretation, we ought to satisfy ourselves on valid grounds, that the facts which we assume as historical, are real. The facts which we make use

of as aids in doctrinal interpretation, ought to be well authenticated and supported. Any others will certainly be delusive.

Tradition is too uncertain to be worthy of the least confidence as a rule of judgment, in relation to this matter. It has never proved a safe depository for truth, or a safe channel for its continued transmission during any long period of time.

The degree of influence which particular historical facts ought to have, in determining our doctrinal opinions, depends entirely on the relation of those facts to the opinions in question ; and upon the relation of those opinions to known Scriptural evidence on the same subjects.

The more direct and immediate the relation of a particular fact is, to a doctrinal opinion, the greater influence it ought to exert in favor of that opinion. The more direct and immediate the relation of a doctrinal opinion is, to known Scriptural evidence, the less amount of external evidence, of any kind, will be requisite, to establish it. In proportion as there is more evidence from either one of these sources, less will be requisite from the other, to establish a point in question.

6. *Systematic theology.* The statement of the different religious doctrines of the Bible, in their natural order and connexions, constitutes a system of religious doctrine, or of Biblical theology. The study of these doctrines in their mutual relations to each other, is essential to the attainment of any profound and extensive knowledge of them. The careful study of well written systems of Divinity, contributes es-

sentially to promote the correct doctrinal interpretation of the Bible. The systematic statement of religious doctrines, facilitates our perfect apprehension of them, as exhibited in the Scriptures.

Few have ever become eminent for their attainments in this department of religious knowledge, who have not availed themselves of the works of writers on systematic theology. These works ought not to be studied as depositories of certain truth, or ultimate sources of information on religious doctrine, but solely as helps to a more perfect understanding of the doctrinal passages of the Bible.

Sec. 2. General principles relating to the material types and symbols of the Bible.

1. Ordinary discourse consists of words which are used directly as the signs of things. In allegorical discourses, words are used to represent supposed objects and events, which are themselves the signs of analogous ones. There is yet another kind of discourse, and another modification of language, in which words are used as the signs of real or supposed objects and events, which objects and events are themselves the signs of similar or analogous ones. These symbolical objects and events are frequently to be met with in the Bible. The right interpretation of them, is often a matter of no small difficulty, and of no inconsiderable importance.

All language is symbolical; but the words type and symbol are generally used in a particular and restricted sense, to denote objects and transactions, which are themselves the designed representations

of other and different objects, and of higher and different transactions.

In this sense the sacrifices of the former dispensation were types of Christ; and circumcision a symbol of regeneration. In the same sense, baptism and the Lord's supper are symbolical institutions. The lamb, or other animal offered in sacrifice, represented Christ suffering for sin. The bread and wine of the Lord's supper, represent the body and blood of Christ, taxed with suffering on our account, and becoming efficacious in the procurement of pardon and eternal life.

All Scriptural types and symbols have some meaning, either as material representations of co-existing objects, or else of past or future objects or events. Used to denote such representations, these words are nearly synonymous, and are applied indiscriminately to many of the same things. The word type, however, is most generally applied to denote a material representation of something to come, and symbol of something past. According to this usage, sacrifices are denominated types, and the bread and wine of the Lord's supper, symbols. The lamb offered in sacrifice, was a type of Christ, and the bread and wine of the Lord's supper, are symbolical representations of him.

2. The Scriptural types and symbols are either simple or complex. A material representation of any single object, is a simple type or symbol. Where more than a single object is represented, the type or symbol of such representation is complex. The elements of all the Scrpture types and symbols, are

simple. In their combinations they are usually exhibited as complex, and require a careful analysis in order to their right explanation.

These modes of communication may further be considered as historical, prophetical, or moral. Each simple element is of one or the other of these characters. In their complex state, two or more of these characteristics are generally united. The same complex type is partly historical and partly of a moral nature; or partly prophetical and moral, &c. or else, as is sometimes the fact, it may combine the historical, prophetical, and moral, in one complex, emblematical representation. For example; contemplate an analysis of the *Sabbath*.

(1) The Sabbath, considered in respect to its weekly recurrence, and holy rest, is a symbol of a past event, the completion of the work of creation;

(2.) Considered in respect to its observance on the first day of the week, it is commemorative of another past event, the resurrection of Christ;

(3.) Considered in respect to its holy and religious services and pleasures, it is a type of a future sabbatism, the employments and pleasures of heaven.

Circumcision. (1.) Circumcision, considered as the appointed seal of God's covenant with his people, was a token, a remembrancer, of that covenant; a means of keeping it in mind, and of preserving a knowledge of it.

(2.) In another respect it was the emblem of moral purification, and represented the work of the Holy Spirit, in regeneration and sanctification.

(3.) As an act of subjection and a sign of allegi-

ance to God, and of professed submission to his authority, it was expressive of an obligation to keep the whole law. See Gal. v. 3.

Many of the institutions of religion, under the former dispensation, were of a symbolical character. This was the case with the Sabbath, sacrifices, and circumcision. The Sabbath, the Lord's supper, and baptism, are symbolical now.

The symbolical objects which occur in the Scriptures, aside from the institutions of religion, are numerous; of which the following may serve as specimens: The mystical river of Ezekiel, xlvii.; the great image decribed in Dan. ii.; the stone cut out of the mountain without hands, which grew, and became itself a mountain, Dan. ii.; the tree described in Dan. iv.; the four beasts described in Dan. vii.

Many other prophetic symbols might be added to this list; but these are probably sufficient to answer the purpose of illustration.

3. The Scriptural types and symbols are founded on the same principle as metaphors and allegories, that of resemblance or analogy; but they do not attain their end by the same means. Metaphors and allegories are figures of words and paragraphs; symbols and types are figures of things, which words literally designate. The symbolical language of the Scriptures, corresponds to the hieroglyphics or symbolical and emblematical language of the ancients; in which a representation of one object, was used extensively to denote a similar or analogous one, of a higher order. Thus, an eye was the hieroglyphical symbol of knowledge; a circle, of eternity; a vi-

per, of ingratitude; an ant of wisdom; the sun, of God.

There must be some resemblance or analogy between objects, or in order to lay a foundation for the symbolical use of them. This analogy does not, however, constitute them symbols. They are made symbols, as different combinations of letters are made words, and as words are made metaphors; by receiving an express designation to that office, and by being actually used in a symbolical sense.

4. In the Bible all those objects ought to be considered symbols, which God has made use of, as such, and no others. In the investigation of the Scripture symbols, therefore, we are not at liberty to multiply these modes of instruction, according to any fancied or real adaptation of one object to represent another, but simply according to Divine appointment, and known Scripture usage.

We ought not to consider the metaphorical language of the Bible as indicating that the objects from which it is taken, possess a symbolical character. Some of the Scriptural metaphors are taken from symbolical objects and transactions; but in regard to the great majority of them, this is not the fact. The objects from which most of the metaphorical language of the Scriptures is derived, have no fixed Scriptural meaning, as Divinely appointed symbols; and cannot, with propriety, have such meanings assigned them by the interpreter.

In the relation and use of tropical expressions, the inspired writers seem to have taken the same liberties, and acted on the same principles as other men.

They describe the futue by figurative representations drawn from the present and past, as they were to some extent compelled to do, if they described it at all. Invisible realities, they often set forth by metaphors, drawn from visible objects. But in either case, their language does not imply the existence of any other relation between the objects compared, than that of general analogy or resemblance; a relation which is at the foundation of all metaphorical or allegorical representations whatever.

A disposition to magnify every Scriptural object into a type or symbol; like that to exalt every word into a metaphor, has no adequate foundation, either in Scripture or reason. Under pretext of making the Scriptures more significant and instructive, it often diverts us from their plain and obvious meaning into an idle search after some higher symbolical sense, which they were never designed to convey.

The field of Scriptural symbolical imagery is extensive; but still it has its limits. Those limits are capable of being determined with considerable accuracy. Every Biblical interpreter ought, as far as he can, to determine and observe them.

5. The symbolical use of objects, is as much an arbitrary procedure, to be decided on according to evidence, as that of words. In the absence of evidence that a word is used in a particular way, we have no reason to conclude that it is so used. The same is true in respect to objects and transactions. This evidence may be somewhat diverse in kind, but it must be evidence. Nothing less will answer the condi-

tions of the case. To interpret objects as symbols, on mere conjecture, is utterly erroneous.

Nothing short of testimony to the fact, or decisive circumstantial evidence of it, can be a valid ground for considering any Scriptural object or transaction, symbolical. The propriety of this rule arises from the very nature of the case. A material symbol implies the arbitrary designation of one object to represent another. The connexion between a type and antitype, is therefore arbitrary, and must be explained in order to be understood. It cannot be determined except by an explanation of some kind. This may be direct or indirect, but it must comprise an unequivocal indication of the fact in question, before that fact can be admitted.

To proceed a step in the recognition of types and symbols, without being guided by evidence, is to become the inventors of symbolical and typical significations, rather than the interpreters of them, as invented and used by others.

The Scriptural symbols are a part of the Divine communications, and as such, must have been designed to express a particular sense. But how can we determine the sense of a symbolical communication, any further than we have decisive evidence that the objects composing it are symbolical? All the Scriptural symbols are accompanied with manifest and unequivocal indications of their symbolical character, or not. If they are, these indications can be ascertained and appreciated. If not, God has so far departed from the established and otherwise universal principles of language, in this part of his word,

as to render some portions of it incapable of being certainly and fully understood, without further revelation, definitive of its hidden sense; a supposition unsustained by any substantial evidence, and inconsistent with the doctrine of the perfection of the Holy Scriptures, as a rule of faith and practice.

Sec. 3. Rules for determining the signification of material types and symbols.

A knowledge of the nature of material types and symbols is necessary as a prerequisite to understanding them. The interpretation of this part of the Divine communications, is attended with some difficulty, and requires particular attention, and persevering study; but it may, to a considerable extent, be accomplished by every sensible person. No man uses any symbol of thought, as a medium for the communication of what he deems important truth, without either supposing that it is already understood, or capable of being determined, or else explaining it.

In the use of any medium of communication, we are justly required to explain what is not indicated with sufficient clearness, in some other way. On this principle, the presumption is irresistible, that every portion of the Divine communications is intelligible by some means; that indications of the sense of all the symbols of the Bible, both material and verbal, may be found somewhere, and to a great extent, in the Bible itself.

All the symbols of the Bible are not equally definite and precise in their signification, but they all express an appropriate sense, which is capable of being

determined by a reference to the legitimate sources of information.

1. *The nature of the symbolical object.* Objects are used as the symbols of other objects in consequence of some resemblance or analogy which they bear to one another. A knowledge of these similar or analogous properties in the symbolical object, is as necessary to an understanding of the thing signified, as that of the corresponding properties in a metaphor, is to an understanding of its metaphorical sense. The first thing to be done therefore, in the interpretation of material symbols, is to ascertain and consider the nature of the symbolical object or transaction. In ignorance of this, a true apprehension of the things signified, is impossible.

For example; in determining the proper significancy of the sacrifices, we ought to ascertain what the sacrificial victims and services were. An understanding of these is attainable by a resort to the appropriate sources of information respecting them. The sacrificial victims and services, properly understood, are the indications of that high symbolical sense, with which they are invested by God.

The same is true of all the material symbols. They may consist of objects that are animate or inanimate, simple or complex. Whatever those objects are, they ought to be carefully considered, and their true nature accurately determined. A neglect to do this, has been the occasion of serious and palpable errors in symbolical interpretation. A due knowledge and consideration of symbolical imagery, is particularly

important in the interpretation of those symbols which belong to prophetic vision.

2. *Each essential element of complex and heterogeneous symbols.* When symbols are of a complex and heterogeneous character, each of the complex and heterogeneous elements ought to be taken into the account, in determining their signification. The lion with eagle's wings; the leopard with four wings of a fowl, and four heads; Dan. vii. 4, 6. The dragon with seven heads and ten horns; Rev, xii. 3, and the nameless beast, with the same complement both of heads and horns; Rev. xiii. 1, 2, are instances of heterogeneous symbolical imagery. The omission of any single element of a heterogeneous symbol, may essentially vitiate our estimate of its meaning, and all our reasonings respecting it.

3. *The leading features of a symbol.* No one object can be made a true representative of another, in all respects. The resemblance or analogy of one object or transaction to another, is in all cases partial, extending only to such properties and relations as they possess in common.

In order that one object may serve as a fit type or symbol of another, it must possess some prominent and obvious points of resemblance or analogy to it. If the points of resemblance are not in any degree prominent and obvious, the symbol will be proportionably inexpressive and obscure. In proportion as they are prominent and obvious, will the symbol be both expressive and intelligible. In the study of symbols therefore, it is necessary to investigate accurately, the points of resemblance between the sym-

bolical object or transaction, and the thing signified by it. These will generally be the leading and prominent features and characteristics of the symbolical object.

4. *Accompanying explanations.* A knowledge and consideration of a symbolical object; and an investigation of its leading features, do not necessarily suggest its true and full import. For example; we may be sufficiently acquainted with the character and habits of the horse, or lion, or leopard, or dragon, and not understand at all, what these animals are used to represent in prophetic vision. In order to make these modes of communication significant, there is often some accompanying indication of their true import. In some cases the accompanying explanations are as full and complete as words can express. In some cases they are less explicit, without being essentially less satisfactory or necessary.

Wherever accompanying explanations occur, they ought to receive the most minute and careful attention. Their aid is of indispensable necessity to the right interpretation of symbols. The symbolical institutions of the Bible are accompanied with important explanations of this kind. The same is true in respect to most of the prophetic symbols, especially those which belong to the books of Daniel, Zechariah, and that of Revelation.

5. *Collateral information.* When there is no accompanying explanation of a Scriptural type or symbol, or one that is indefinite and indecisive, our next resort is to collateral information contained in other parts of the Bible. This may be either direct or in-

direct. It is direct when it consists of a formal explanation of the symbol. Of this character is the explanation of circumcision, contained in Rom. iv. 11, where that rite is declared to have been a sign and seal of the righteousness of faith; or in other words, of justification by faith; also in Rom. ii. 28, 29, where the same is declared not to be merely outward in the flesh, but inward, denoting a work of grace on the heart and spirit, the praise of which is not of men but of God.

Of the same direct specific character, are the explanations of the ancient sacrifices, contained in Heb. x. where they are represented as having been a shadow of good things then future, and as adumbrating the greater and more excellent sacrifice of Christ, by which he hath perfected for ever, all them that believe.

The collateral information of the Scriptures, on this subject, is indirect when it does not comprehend a formal explanation of the symbol, but the statement of a fact or principle, from which such information may be inferred. Such statements sometimes occur in the context to which the symbols they illustrate belong, and sometimes in remote portions of the sacred volume. Of this character is the declaration of God, addressed to the serpent, Gen. iii. 15. "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed. It shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." This passage evidently refers to the Savior of the human race, who was to be a descendant of the woman, and by whom Satan was to be vanquished, and his captives

delivered. The bruising of his heel, indicates the temporary sufferings he should endure in achieving the conquest referred to, and in procuring the redemption of sinners. This anticipated conquest, as far as appears from the Bible, was the only ground of hope to ancient believers. It raised their expectation of the destruction of their destroyer, and of their happy deliverance from the dominion of Satan, and the curse brought upon them by sin. Thus interpreted, the passage in question contains a distinct intimation of the advent and work of the Redeemer, as our atoning priest. If the sacrifices had not been otherwise explained, this would probably have been sufficient to indicate their true symbolical import.

Those who read and pondered this mysterious annunciation, must have regarded the sacrifices which were offered for sin, as emblematic representations, and types of that mighty Deliverer, by whom the head of the serpent was to be crushed at the expense of his own temporary and personal sufferings. Since it was impossible that their offerings should have been supposed by the pious, to possess any direct efficacy in procuring the remission of sins, they must have been understood from the beginning, to be typical of the expiatory sufferings and death of the Redeemer. In this sense they were subsequently explained by the apostle Paul, not as mysteries which till then had been unrevealed, but as great religious truths, which had, to some extent, shed their light on every successive generation of believers. We indeed have other evidence of the symbolical character and signification of sacrifices, but that of the

passage adverted to, was sufficient to indicate strongly the facts in respect to this subject.

6. *The nature of the subject.* As in respect to words, so in respect to material symbols, the nature of the subject when otherwise declared, contributes essentially to indicate the sense intended to be conveyed. Material symbols, as well as literal ones, ought to be interpreted according to the known nature of the subject to which they refer. This rule applies equally to symbolical religious rites, and to all other symbolical representations, which belong to the Bible. The known nature of the subject is, in many cases, a principal means of indicating the sense of symbolical communications. In this respect, it performs the same office in symbolical language that it does in all other modes of speech, whether literal or figurative.

7. *Synonymous symbols.* The same object is sometimes represented by different symbols. This is true in some instances, of states and empires. Some of the different symbols of the book of Daniel and of Revelation, are synonymous. For example; the image, Dan. ii. 31—45, is to a great extent synonymous with that of the four beasts, Dan. vii. 1—14. Baptism is, to a great extent, synonymous with circumcision. Symbols are often in part synonymous, when they are not entirely so. The extent to which this is the case, ought to be carefully determined. How far different symbolical representations are synonymous, is a preliminary inquiry of great importance, in reference to many important parts of the

Bible. As far as different symbols are ascertained to be synonymous, they illustrate each other.

8. *Similar or analogous symbolical imagery.* Many of the material symbols of the Bible have a manifest resemblance and analogy to each other, as well as to the objects they respectively represent. This is the fact in respect to animals which occur in prophetic visions. The full signification of some of these symbolical animals, and other objects, is clearly revealed. In the interpretation of others, which are not so fully explained, much assistance may be often derived from comparing them with similar or analogous ones that are. Animal may be compared with animal, and circumstance with circumstance, to advantage. Much caution however, is requisite in comparisons of this kind; and no reliance ought to be placed on such resemblances and analogies, as are remote or doubtful. Very little weight is due to arguments derived from this source, when unsustained by other kinds of evidence. Supported by other evidence, analogies of this kind may contribute to establish many important conclusions.

9. *Symbols considered in respect to chronology.* Material symbols represent things in many of their most important relations and changes. But they do not designate the element of time, with any degree of perspicuity and precision. They often represent objects and events without any relation to the period to which they belong, or through which they extend. In respect to symbolical representations, therefore, the element of time ought always to be supplied, when wanting, from other sources of in-

formation. Chronological questions, in respect to the objects and events adumbrated by many of the prophetical symbols, are among the most complicated and difficult, that arise in the interpretation of the Scriptures. In determining these, we ought always to consider the nature of the symbol, of the subject symbolically represented, and the chronological notices that may occur respecting that subject, either in the context, or in other parts of the Scriptures.

For example; in Dan. vii. 4. the Babylonian empire under Nebuchadnezzar, is represented by a lion having eagle's wings. The transformations which this symbolical animal underwent, in being made to stand up like a man, and in receiving a human spirit, instead of that appropriately belonging to the lion, denote subsequent changes in that empire, without marking in the least, the precise period of their occurrence.

The fact that this animal came out of the sea, previous to either of the three others, mentioned as forming a part of the same prophetic vision, indicates the priority of the Babylonian empire, in point of time, to either of those symbolically represented by the other animals. But neither the precise time of the commencement of this empire, or of its continuance, is noted by the symbol. Whether that empire had yet arisen, or if arisen, how long it had continued at the time of the vision, are matters to be determined by recurring to other sources of information.

In Rev. xii. 1—4, we have an account of the appearance of a symbolical woman, clothed with the

sun, having the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars, an expressive and manifest emblem of the church of God. As a part of the same mystical imagery, we meet with a great red dragon, having seven crowned heads and ten horns, and with his tail casting down from their orbits a third part of the stars of heaven; an equally expressive and obvious emblem of an anti-Christian, hostile power, organized and arrayed against the church. The contemporary appearance of these symbolical objects, indicates the co-existence of the church and of the opposing power, represented by the dragon; but does not give the least intimation of the period when this co-existence commenced, or during which it was to continue. All information respecting these objects, which involves the element of time, must be obtained from considering the nature of the objects thus represented, and from the other sources of knowledge respecting them.

Some chronological information is necessary to explain the nature of the events shadowed forth in this vision, and seems to be presumed to be attainable, to as great an extent as may be necessary for this purpose.

The careful study of the chronology of events, which are symbolically shadowed forth, is of great importance to a right understanding of symbolical imagery. Errors in respect to chronology, lead to many other errors in reference to this class of subjects.

The precise determination of the chronology of some events, symbolically announced in prophecy,

is exceedingly difficult, and perhaps impossible. The same is true in regard to the determination of the precise nature of many events thus indicated. These portions of the inspired records ought to be studied with deep humility and continued attention. A hasty or superficial investigation of them, is sure to bewilder and mislead.

The binding and confinement of Satan for a thousand years, Rev. xx. 1—6, and other contemporaneous events, are of such absorbing interest however interpreted, as to awaken a spirit of earnest and prayerful inquiry into their precise import and chronology, in every successive age of the church. The church universally has manifested a degree of solicitude to know what is meant by these symbols, and when these predictions will be accomplished. Few questions are agitated with deeper interest, at the present time, than those which relate to the precise nature and period of the millennium, here shadowed forth.

These questions however, cannot be satisfactorily and correctly answered, without determining the position of this prophecy in respect to the series of prophetic announcements; ascertaining and comparing synonymous prophecies, if there are any which are manifestly so; and also those which are in any way nearly or remotely related to these, so as to be definitive of their import, or indicative of their chronological relations.

A mistake in respect to the position of this prophecy, in the chronological series of prophetic announcements, or in respect to the determination of

synonymous or otherwise related predictions, may lead to utterly erroneous conclusions respecting the whole subject.

10. *Conclusion.* By an application of the principles and rules stated, and to some extent, illustrated in the foregoing pages, much of the symbolical and typical imagery of the Bible may be satisfactorily understood and explained. Without some knowledge of them, this part of Divine revelation, is mostly a sealed book. It presents a confused mass of images, and shadowy representations, but the pearl of substantial and satisfactory knowledge, is effectually concealed; and the substance by which these shadows are cast, entirely hid.

The moment we apply the legitimate rules of Interpretation, the chaotic mass of symbolical imagery begins to be reduced to order, and we are enabled to trace in it, the manifest indications of Divine intelligence and wisdom. Nothing can present a more uninviting aspect than the symbolical imagery of the Bible, to one that is entirely unacquainted with the principles and rules, by an application of which, its mysteries are in a measure, at least, unfolded. It is like Greek or Hebrew, to one acquainted merely with the characters in which those languages are written, but ignorant both of the meaning of the words, and of their principles of construction. On this ground even honest Christians are sometimes confounded, and almost ready to stumble into unbelief and infidelity. But let a few rays of the sun light of knowledge be poured in upon the scene, and it becomes bright with unnumbered hues of heavenly

lustre, and celestial radiance. We are at once inducted into one of the most beautiful and splendid apartments of the temple of Scriptural knowledge; and discover in the very symbols which were before an occasion of difficulty, and rock of offence, the most delightful and convincing proofs of the divinity of our holy religion.

Sec. 4. General principles relating to the prophecies.

1. A prophecy is a prediction or declaration of something to come. A considerable part of the Bible is of a prophetic character. Predictions of future events occur in the books of Moses, in the succeeding historical books, in the books of the prophets, properly so called, in the gospels and epistles of the New Testament; and are brought to a splendid and glorious conclusion in the book of Revelation. They consist either of verbal communications, received directly from God, or from some divinely authorized messenger; or else of supernatural views, excited in the mind or the prophet by the silent operation of the Holy Spirit; or else of visions and dreams, produced by the same Divine influence.

2. Prophecy corresponds to history. It is like that, a description of events. It differs from history in being written before the events referred to, have taken place, and before they are capable of being ascertained by the ordinary sources of information. It is generally less definite and particular than historical narratives; but like history, it is expected in all cases to give a faithful and true delineation of the

events referred to, and one that shall distinguish them from all others.

In many cases the language of prophecy is as explicit and distinguishing as any part of the Scriptures, or as language can be. Many of the prophecies are of obvious import, and require but an ordinary degree of attention to be correctly and fully understood. Many that would otherwise be difficult and perhaps unintelligible to us, are explained, either in the context to which they belong, or in other parts of the Bible. Many however, are left obscure, and require to be diligently and perseveringly studied, in order to be understood.

3. The peculiar obscurity of the prophecies, arises in most cases from the following circumstances.

(1.) The entire want of chronological notices, or else the use of but few, and those mostly of an indefinite character.

(2.) The free and extensive use of tropical or figurative language, with less means of distinguishing what is figurative, and less facilities for determining the precise signification of figurative expressions, than are enjoyed in other departments of Interpretation.

(3.) The use of a great variety of material types and symbols, many of which are not accompanied with any explicit declaration of their proper and true meaning.

Frequent and explicit chronological notices, contribute much to the perspicuity of history. The infrequency and indefiniteness of these, in many of the prophecies, occasion the same obscurity in this

part of the Divine communications, which they would occasion in history if admitted there.

The difficulty of distinguishing many of the prophetic tropes or figures of speech, from literal expressions, arises in part from our not being able to compare and identify the description with the event, as we uniformly do in historical narratives. Words and phrases used in respect to a known event, are rendered definite by the event, when they would otherwise be of an opposite character. This cause of obscurity operates in respect to all those propheeies which are not known to be accomplished, and which are not illustrated by the actual occurrences they decribe. It ceases as soon as prophecies are known to be accomplished.

This cause of obscurity arises from the very nature of prophecy, as a description or intimation of future events. It is impossible for words to convey as definite conceptions in respect to many events while future, as they may do in respect to the same, when past. If there were no other causes of obscurity, this of itself would be sufficient to render the interpretation of many prophecies which are yet unfulfilled, a matter of peculiar difficulty.

God however, has undoubtedly important reasons, aside from the principles or imperfections of language, for shedding some degree of obscurity over this part of his word.

Were these developments made in every case so clear that they could not be easily misunderstood, they would probably often prove a serious obsta-

cle to their own fulfilment, and to the accomplishment of the Divine purposes.

The extensive use of tropical or symbolical language, even at the expense of perspicuity and precision, is on this principle fully authorized and indeed loudly demanded.

Tropical and symbolical representations shadow forth the events of futurity with sufficient precision to answer the purposes for which prophecy is given; but not to impede their own fulfilment. We have therefore, in the very structure of the prophetic Scriptures, as well as in their supernatural announcements of truth, the indications of that Divine wisdom, under the guidance of which, every part of the Bible was written.

The figurative character of the prophecies, and the general terms in which many of them are expressed, render a careful discrimination of figurative from literal expressions, highly important, and in some cases difficult.

The general principles of language, however, apply equally to the determination of all questions relative to the tropical use of words in the prophecies, and in every other part of the Scriptures. These principles, if duly regarded, will in most cases lead to correct and certain conclusions. They seldom lead to error, if truly followed. If we fall into errors on this subject, it will be in spite of them, not in conformity with their direction.

Cherishing due respect for these principles, we shall never depart from the literal interpretation of words, without evident reason and necessity, in the

prophecies, any more than in other portions of the Bible. But when manifest indications of a figurative or tropical sense exist, we should interpret the words to which they relate accordingly.

These indications are literal incongruity or incorrectness; definitive clauses and circumstances requiring a figurative interpretation of the words to which they relate; a literal disagreement of parallel predictions; a manifest allusion to earlier occurrences, either in Jewish or general history; to existing objects and institutions, and to distinguished individuals.

Most of these principles have been sufficiently illustrated. The use of figurative expressions taken from past occurrences, from existing objects and institutions, and from distinguished persons, is common to every class of writers, particularly poets and orators. It is not strange therefore, that they should be of frequent occurrence in the prophecies of the Bible, many of which are written in poetry of the most impassioned character.

The Hebrew writers understood too well the prolific sources of powerful and heart stirring imagery, which were furnished them in the stupendous events of their national history; in their religious institutions; and also in distinguished individuals that adorned their annals; not to draw from these sources for the improvement of their poetry and eloquence.

Under the fervor of the highest poetic excitement, and the still higher influences of inspiration, we find

them using the most sublime and varied imagery, with the most powerful effect. They unite the greatest boldness and vigor of conception, with the greatest refinement and delicacy of taste. Some of their highest poetic efforts, and some of their noblest productions were put forth under the influence of the Spirit of prophecy. Those productions ought to be interpreted in the bold and impassioned spirit in which they were written, in order to be interpreted aright.

Under an overpowering sense of coming events, they made use of the most sublime imagery at their command, for the purpose of embodying and setting forth their strong conceptions. If Zion is to be delivered from her low estate; they talk of the destruction of the Egyptian sea, and the drying up of rivers, that men may go over dry shod. Isa. xi. 15, 16. To describe the Divine protection of the saints in future years; they speak of the creation of the cloud of smoke by day, and the fire by night, on all their dwellings, and around all their assemblies. Isa. iv. 5. The future piety of the church, is set forth under the figure of a continual sacrifice, whereby the priests and Levites shall be constantly employed. Jer. xxxiii. 18. A distinguished prophet, they call Elijah, Mal. iv. 5, and our blessed Lord, they designate by the appellation of David, and represent him like that honored prince, both as a faithful shepherd and mighty king. Ezek. xxxiv. 23, 24; xxxvii. 24, 25; Hosea iii. 5.

Sec. 5. Rules for determining the signification of the prophecies.

1. All the usual principles and rules for determining the signification of words and other symbols, are applicable to the prophecies. A faithful application of them all, is of indispensable necessity to the right interpretation of this part of the Scriptures.

2. The position of any particular prophecy in respect to the time and circumstances of its delivery, often contributes to illustrate its true meaning. This is the fact in respect to every species of discourse, but it is emphatically so in respect to the prophecies. The first step therefore to be taken, in the interpretation of a prophetic discourse, is to determine, if possible, the time when it was delivered, and the circumstances of the prophet and people at that time. In some cases these are expressly declared; as in Isa. vi. 1. "In the year that king Uzziah died, I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne," &c. This is an explicit declaration of the time of the prophetic vision which follows. The circumstances of the people at that time, to whom the prophecy was addressed, are described with sufficient clearness in other parts of the Old Testament.

In the succeeding chapter we have another discourse, represented as being delivered in the time of Ahaz, and of course more than sixteen years later than the preceding; since the reign of Jotham, which continued sixteen years, must have intervened.

In some cases when the date of a prophetical discourse is not expressly given, it may be inferred

from an inspection of the context, or of the discourse itself. It may be indicated by some expression referring to contemporary objects or events, the dates of which are capable of being nearly or accurately ascertained.

This is the case with the prophecy contained in the first chapter of Isaiah. In the 6th and 7th verses of this chapter, the land of Judah is described as being desolated by enemies, and the condition of the people as being one of extreme depression and distress. By turning to the books of Kings and Chronicles, we find that the description above referred to, cannot have indicated the state of things in the prosperous reign of Uzziah, or in that of Jotham; but that it accords perfectly with the state of that country in the disastrous reign of Ahaz. Hence we infer with considerable confidence, that the prophecy contained in this chapter, was delivered in the reign of Ahaz, and in view of the disastrous consequences of that prevailing impiety, for which he was, in common with many others, distinguished, more than sixteen years later than the 6th chapter of the same book.

Too much attention cannot be given to the subject of determining as accurately as possible, the dates of prophetical discourses; preparatory to interpreting them. In making these determinations, it ought to be borne in mind, that the different prophetical books of the Old Testament are not arranged in their proper chronological order. Jonah prophesied much earlier than Isaiah, though his book is considerably the latest in the sacred volume. The prophetic books are arranged not in chronological order, but

in that of their comparative magnitudes. The larger books are placed first, and the smaller, last.

A similar arrangement was adopted in regard to the epistles of the New Testament. The longer epistles are, for the most part, placed before the shorter, in the order of their comparative lengths. The epistle to the Hebrews and the book of Revelation, are for particular reasons made exceptions to this general rule.

The different parts of the same book, do not, in all cases, stand in their proper chronological order. A probable instance of this has been given in respect to the first chapter of Isaiah, which, in the order of time, is later than the sixth. Another instance of this kind occurs in Ezek. xxix. 17—21. This prophecy is dated the twenty-seventh year of the captivity of Jehoichin, at which time Ezekiel became a captive, while that which commences in Ezek. xxxi. 1, is declared to have been communicated in the eleventh, making a difference of sixteen years.

This irregularity probably arose from the fact, that the different prophetical discourses composing a book, were first published separately, and not till after the deaths of the writers, collected into one volume. When they were collected and put together in the same volume, there was no very thorough examination of their chronological relations, in consequence of which some were placed out of their proper chronological positions.

3. All the parts of a prophetical discourse, taken together, mutually illustrate each other. They ought therefore, to be studied in their mutual relations to

each other as constituent parts of the same discourse, and not as separate discourses. A course, the opposite of this is often pursued. Many persons study the Bible by chapters, and endeavor to interpret every chapter by itself. If the beginning of every chapter was the beginning of a discourse, and the termination of it the termination of the same, the method of studying the Bible by chapters, would be correct. But the division of chapters does not bear any correspondence to the division of subjects and discourses. We ought therefore, in our study of the Bible, especially the prophetic parts of it, to ascertain the real divisions in respect to subjects, and discourses, and to investigate every discourse by itself. Some prophetic discourses occupy but part of a chapter; and some occupy several chapters. If sufficient pains is taken to ascertain the natural divisions of this kind, they will generally be discovered, and will contribute essentially to facilitate the interpretation of difficult words and paragraphs.

4. The leading subject of a prophetical discourse, contributes to define many assertions which have relation to it.

For example; in Matt. xxv. 31—46; the leading subject of the discourse is the general judgment. All the elements of that scene are present, and stand out with a degree of prominence, which renders it difficult to be mistaken in respect to that subject. After becoming fully convinced from an examination of this passage, and of the context, that the general judgment is the real subject to which it relates;

we are authorized to explain the different parts of it accordingly.

A knowledge of the leading subject treated of, makes the explanation of every subordinate part of the discourse easy, where, without any assistance from this source, many important phrases would be difficult, if not inexplicable. The same words may have very different meanings, according to the nature of the subject to which they are applied; and the connexions in which they stand.

5. Events which are mentioned continuously, ought to be carefully distinguished from each other. Events may be continuous, as represented on the chart of prophecy, when in fulfilment, they are separated by the lapse of centuries. Where events are clearly predicted, the precise times of their accomplishment are often concealed. They are often grouped together in prophecy, as well as in other kinds of discourse, in consequence of some general relation of resemblance or contrast, when in point of time they are widely separated from each other.

We are not therefore, to infer, because events are described or referred to in immediate succession, or make a part of the same discourse, that their occurrence will be either contemporaneous or contiguous. The reverse is often true. For example; the sufferings of the Redeemer, and the feeble beginnings of his kingdom, are often predicted in connexion with the triumphant and universal establishment of his spiritual reign, while they are separated by the lapse of many centuries.

Inattention to this fact, has occasioned frequent

and serious errors in prophetical interpretation, both in ancient and modern times.

The 24th chapter of Matthew, sufficiently difficult at best, has been rendered unnecessarily so, by a neglect of the principle stated in this paragraph. The subjects treated of in the discourse commencing in that chapter, are mentioned explicitly in the second and third verses, and are the following, namely; the destruction of Jerusalem, the future coming, or second advent of Christ, and the end of the world; events entirely distinct, though treated of continuously in the prophetical discourse which relates to them.

Matt. xxiv. 4—28, commencing the discourse of our Lord in answer to these questions, evidently relates to the first exclusively, the destruction of Jerusalem. Matthew xxiv. 29—31, treats of the second advent of Christ, and of accompanying and preceding events. This passage is as follows: "Immediately after the tribulation of those days, shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken. And then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven; and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven, with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."

Having given a brief but vivid and forcible description of these two events, the destruction of Je-

rusalem, and his second advent, the Redeemer proceeds to remark on the former, in Matt. xxiv. 32—35, under the appellation of *these things*, and says: This generation shall not pass away, till all these things, the things relating to the first mentioned event, shall be fulfilled. The 36th and following verses, refer to the latter event, the second advent of Christ, under the appellation of *that day*. But of that day and that hour, that is, the day and hour, or in other words, the precise time of the second advent, knoweth no man; no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only. Here is a manifest antithesis between *these things* of the 33d verse, being known and near, and *that day*, of the 36th verse, being unknown to man or angel. The subjects therefore of these verses must be different, and can be no other than those which have been specified. The same thing is not both known and unknown, revealed and unrevealed.

The appellation *that day*, is applied to denote the period of the second advent, in 2 Tim. iv. 8; "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge shall give me at that day." What particular day the apostle means, he does not here specify. He uses the phrase, that day, as one which was too well understood to need explanation; and can mean nothing else by it, than the day of the Lord, which will come as a thief in the night to the wicked, and in which the heavens shall pass away, and the earth be destroyed. 2 Pet. iii. 10, 12.

6. The prophecies considered as embracing one

connected and continuous chain of events, contribute to illustrate each other. They ought therefore to be studied together, in order to be most perfectly understood. All interpretations of them, in which their relations to each other are not duly regarded, are manifestly wrong. When we have ascertained the place of a particular prediction in the chain of prophetic announcements, we have gained an important point in the determination of its precise signification.

Almost every part of the prophetic writings has some relation to other parts of the same. In order to understand one such part well, we must contemplate it in connexion with other parts of the same to which it is related. In order to understand well, a part of a prophetical book, we ought to study the whole, and in order to understand one book, we ought to study others, especially those which relate to the same period of time, and the same or similar events.

7. Every prophecy ought to be interpreted as having one true meaning, and only one; and as corresponding in this respect to history. The meaning of a single prediction may be very comprehensive, embracing under a general designation, a great variety of particulars; and those extending over a great length of time. But they constitute a single consistent sense, not a variety of independent senses.

Many of the predictions of the Bible are of this general character, and receive a gradual and progressive fulfilment, which it requires centuries to complete.

Of this general character, is the remarkable prediction of Noah, Gen. ix. 25—27. "And he said, cursed be Canaan, a servant of servants shall he be to his brethren. And he said, blessed be the Lord God of Shem, and Canaan shall be his servant. God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem, and Canaan shall be his servant."

The names of these several patriarchs, are used by metonymy, to denote their descendants. The prophecy therefore relates to the fortunes of the human race. It has no limitation in respect to time; it may therefore be taken in its most general sense, as extending indefinitely into the future.

The general condition of these great portions of the human family, has in every successive generation borne a remarkable correspondence to these early predictions; and shown them to be of extensive import, as from the very terms in which they are expressed, we might suppose them to be. The protracted series of events which correspond to these early intimations of the Divine purposes, constitutes one comprehensive but single accomplishment of the same.

Many of the Scripture prophecies which relate to the rise and fall of kingdoms, are of this general description; many of those which relate to the triumphant establishment and universal prevalence of the kingdom of Christ, are of the same character. The numerous subordinate events which constitute the fulfilment of the prophecies here referred to, are partly simultaneous and partly successive. But they do not authorize the adoption of any other modes of in-

terpretation than those which apply to other departments of human language. Therefore they ought to be interpreted in conformity with the principles which apply to the interpretation of language generally; and which have been explained in the foregoing pages.

8. The history of the period, and of the events to which prophecies relate, contribute essentially to illustrate their true meaning. Predictions derive illustration from the history of the times and events to which they refer, on the principle that a general description is illustrated by a more definite one. The prophecies are mostly general. History is more particular and precise in its disclosures. The latter therefore, affords essential aid in giving precision and accuracy to our understanding of the former.

The Bible contains a complete history of the fulfilment of many of its prophecies. This is the fact in regard to many which relate to the Jewish, and to other nations of ancient times; and also to Christ, and the church.

Later ecclesiastical and general history contribute still further to illustrate the prophetic announcements of the Bible, and ought to be made use of for this purpose. History is one of the most important keys to the correct understanding of the prophecies; and if studied in connexion with them, can hardly fail of affording valuable aid in determining their proper and true sense, to a greater extent than is attainable by any other means.

9. All those interpretations of the prophecies in which the events supposed to be predicted, do not

correspond to the prediction, must be erroneous. Interpretations of this objectionable character, are by no means uncommon. They are often resorted to for the purpose of supporting an erroneous theory; and so far as prophecy is concerned, may often be detected by the manifest want of correspondence between the prediction, and the events supposed to be indicated.

This rule is at once obvious and highly useful. An application of it, shows the incorrectness of those interpretations which wrest some portions of the 24th and 25th of Matthew, from their obvious import, and apply them entirely to the destruction of Jerusalem, and other preceding and contemporaneous events.

The prophetic account of the advent of Christ, contained in those chapters, and of the general judgment, in which all nations are to be concerned, and their destinies of happiness or misery decided upon; has nothing properly corresponding with it, in the destruction of Jerusalem, or in any preceding or contemporaneous events. There was no visible advent of Christ at the destruction of Jerusalem, or on the day of pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was miraculously poured out. There was no general judgment at those times, in which all nations were concerned; no public reception of the righteous into glory, or banishment of the wicked into a state of misery and despair. All things continued as they were. The righteous were still liable to insult and injury, and the wicked often prosperous and insolent. The saints were no more in possession of the king-

dom prepared for them from the foundation of the world, than they ever had been; neither were the wicked essentially more obnoxious to punishment than before.

For these and other similar reasons, therefore, we may safely and confidently conclude, that all the predictions contained in these chapters did not receive their accomplishment at the time, or in the period referred to.

All prophecy must have a proper fulfilment; but the events connected with the destruction of Jerusalem, or belonging to that period of the world, do not constitute, in any degree, a proper fulfilment of the prophecies in question. They cannot therefore, be the events referred to by those predictions.

Sec. 6. The interpretation of the Bible considered as a translation.

The rules or laws of Interpretation which have been laid down and illustrated in the foregoing pages, apply equally to the Scriptures in any language, whether ancient or modern. They apply to the original Hebrew and Greek, and to all the different translations of the same. No translations however, can equal the originals in accuracy and precision. The original Scriptures are the production of God; translations are the work of men; and though many of them have been executed with the greatest fidelity, they are not absolutely perfect.

To assume that every word, and phrase, and sentence, in so large and difficult a work as the Bible, has been translated with perfect accuracy and pre-

cision, so as to answer fully all the purposes of the original, is to indulge a degree of extravagance on this subject, that is nearly unparalleled in other departments of the exercise of reason, and utterly unauthorized and inexcusable. It is to be presumed that some words and phrases, and even sentences, in the best translations of the Bible, will fail to express the precise and full import of the original.

The English reader wishes to know, and needs in many cases to be informed, how he can determine the correctness of the translation in common use, in any particular and important doctrinal passages. The difficulties in which this subject is involved, have probably discouraged some from even seriously attempting to settle their belief in regard to Biblical doctrines of fundamental importance. They have furnished a plausible excuse for skepticism and error, to such as love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil.

But honest and earnest inquirers after truth, need not fall into despair or discouragement, though unable to explore the depths of ancient learning. Truth may be ascertained, as far as it is necessary to the attainment of saving faith and Christian practice. The following principles are obvious and important in their relation to the Scriptures considered as a translation.

1. Where there is a known difference between a part of the translation and the original, the latter ought always to be preferred and followed. Such differences necessarily exist, and some of them are indicated to the common reader by the most decisive

evidence. Where they do exist, we ought to use our endeavors to ascertain them, and form our judgments accordingly.

To exalt any translation above the original, when a discrepancy is perceived, is an instance of extreme folly, and of manifest prejudice.

2. Every part of the translation should be presumed to be right, till we find evidence that it is wrong. To suspect the correctness of every part of a translation, because it is inevitable from the nature of the case, that some parts should be imperfect, is unreasonable and erroneous. To set aside a passage of Scripture, or explain away its obvious meaning, on the ground of a merely supposed inaccuracy in the translation, is to act in a manner utterly arbitrary and unreasonable, as well as delusive.

3. In all cases where the correctness of the translation is called in question, we ought to decide that question according to evidence. Conjectural decisions on such a subject, as on all others, are entirely unwarranted. The sources of evidence on this subject are various. The following are particularly worthy of consideration: (1.) the testimony of learned men; (2.) a consideration of their arguments in relation to any case in hand; (3.) other passages in which the same original word may be known to be used; (4.) the known nature of the subject; (5.) the context, &c.

A translation which is supported by these different sources of evidence, must be right; one which is manifestly disproved by any one of them, is thereby shown to be wrong.

4. The general agreement of commentators and other learned men, in regard to the correctness of a translation, may be safely relied on as indicating the truth. If several different commentators or other learned men, professing to have satisfactory and certain knowledge of the subject, decide that a particular passage of Scripture is correctly translated, or otherwise; in the absence of any counter testimony, we have strong reason to confide in their decision. Such an agreement of opinion cannot exist without reason. The probable reason of it is, convincing evidence.

This rule lays a foundation for confidence in the general correctness of our common English translation of the Bible. Commentators and other learned men of every respectable denomination of Christians, and many who have not been the adherents of any particular sect, have generally acquiesced in this decision. They have given in their united testimony for the instruction and encouragement of all those, who are incompetent to ascend to the higher sources of evidence, and see for themselves. This agreement is extensive, embracing persons of very different theological opinions. It is general with those of the different classes to which it extends. The cases of dissent from it, are few and unimportant. They are not of sufficient number and dignity to impair the well founded confidence which arises from the general agreement of the wise and good; an agreement at once particular, cordial and extensive.

5. A translation that does not make any consistent sense, must be wrong. In our common English

Bible, examples of this are rare; but they are numerous in the controversial works of some, who with little knowledge and less honesty, have endeavored to translate the sacred volume so as to leave its offensive doctrines behind.

To maintain that any translation is correct, which does not express a consistent sense, is a high impeachment of the inspired writings. It is as much as to say, that God has inspired men to write nonsense; or else that the sacred writers were not inspired at all by God. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and being thus given, is profitable for doctrine. In order to be of this character, it must in the original express a real and consistent sense, and in every correct translation it, must of course, have a corresponding signification.

6. In cases where the correctness of a translation, is both advocated and opposed by learned Biblical scholars, common readers, if they think it important to decide where the truth lies, ought to examine thoroughly the different sources of evidence which are accessible to them, and compare the amount and validity of the evidences on one side, with those of the opposing evidences on the other. In this way they may often arrive at certain and correct conclusions, while others more learned than themselves, may be disquieting their minds in vain with doubts and difficulties, and disturbing others with unprofitable controversy. The sources of information which are accessible to all intelligent persons, in respect to the true sense of the Bible in the original languages,

are sufficient to prevent any great deception, or imposition in regard to its sense, from being extensively practiced. Individuals are found, who are bad enough to make this nefarious attempt. Through the credulity and voluntary ignorance of some, they have succeeded to a limited extent. But they can never take the keys of knowledge out of the hands of an intelligent and inquisitive community, or cut off any great number of individuals from a perception of the truth. They may cut off from the multitude some of the rays of correct Scriptural knowledge, but they cannot blot out or greatly darken the everlasting sun of the moral heavens, the Bible.

In regard to all those items of Scriptural knowledge which depend upon learned testimony, and in respect to which the testimony of learned men is discordant, we ought to proceed according to the same rules by which we are governed in harmonizing discordant testimony on other subjects. Self-contradiction, manifestations of prejudice, ignorance, absurdity, are as indubitable indications of error, in the court of theological inquiry, as at any human judgment seat.

The opposing evidence of the few must yield to that of the many; and that of those who are manifestly under the influence of prejudice, or of selfish or ambitious desire, or any other bias, to the higher testimony of the unprejudiced and uncorrupted. Those matters of testimony which are sustained by the general consent of the wise and good, cannot be rendered doubtful by the counter testimony of the

few. Certainly not, when those few give manifest indications either of incompetency or dishonesty.

7. When other sources of information are inaccessible or unsatisfactory, the inquirer who is unskilled in the ancient languages, ought to consult a competent clergyman, of any respectable branch of the Christian church, on the matter in question. He will seldom do this without benefit, if not with complete satisfaction.

Most clergymen have opportunities and means of information on religious subjects, which but few others enjoy. It is expected therefore, that with ordinary natural powers, and suitable diligence in their high vocation, they will attain a superior degree of skill and knowledge, in respect to Divine truth. The benefits of this may be enjoyed by every candid and anxious inquirer, to his very great advantage and comfort. Valuable knowledge may be obtained in this and other ways, if men will take the pains requisite to attain it.

It is not proposed that any man's private opinions should be adopted, as a rule of faith, or of interpretation, by the unlearned. To pursue such a course, would be to renounce the liberal exercise of judgment, and to surrender ourselves up to any guidance which may happen to arrest us. But it is recommended that those whose information on religious subjects is necessarily limited, should avail themselves of the more extensive and accurate knowledge of others. This they may easily do; and by doing it be greatly benefitted.

Men's knowledge and opinions are very different things. We may avail ourselves of their knowledge on important subjects, and make use of it in correcting our own opinions, without embracing theirs. This we ought to do, as far as their opinions are unsupported by intelligible and decisive evidence.

THE LAWS OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION, as they have been developed in this and the preceding chapters, are not mere matters of opinion, or of abstract speculation. For the most part, if not entirely, they are matters of absolute and certain knowledge. They lay the foundation of an art, the art of Interpretation; which is indispensable to any use of language, and some practical knowledge of which, is universal. They constitute the elements of a science, which is undoubtedly destined to exert an important agency in dispersing the clouds of ignorance, in pouring the unobstructed light of Divine truth on the soul, and in diffusing it through the world. This science deserves to be studied. It claims the patient and continued attention of every one who aspires to the character of an enlightened Christian. It ought to be studied in its elements, as a distinct subject of investigation and inquiry, in order to be duly understood and appreciated. In the foregoing pages these elements, it is believed, have been truly and intelligibly stated. As far as this is the case, and no farther, let them be received with favor, and embraced with confidence.

CHAPTER IV.

ERRONEOUS MODES OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION.

SEC. 1. THE RATIONALISTIC MODE OF BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION.

SOME of the truths of revealed religion are so strongly sustained by the general observation and experience of mankind, that they cannot be called in question even by unbelievers. The most violent opposers of all that is peculiar and superhuman in the Christian system, admit these obvious truths on other grounds than the Divine authority and inspiration of the Scriptures, and are willing to acknowledge them as a part of common, but not of inspired truth.

Other parts of the Christian system are of a more spiritual and less obvious character. Some of them relate to objects and events which are entirely beyond the sphere of human observation, and of unassisted reason; and are altogether different from what many would naturally expect to find in an inspired system of religious truth.

Every man feels the utmost confidence in those conclusions which are the fruit of his own careful and accurate observation, or of his own sound and legitimate reasoning from certain premises. Every man therefore, possesses a degree of knowledge

which he regards as certain; and much of which is truly of this character. Some religious and moral truths belong to this class, and are perceived with the utmost clearness, even by infidels.

But while all men believe, with a confidence that cannot be shaken, their own personal observations, and their own legitimate deductions of reason, there are many who have no faith in the Bible. If they think they believe it, they are mistaken, and deceive themselves by erroneous conceptions of what faith is.

That part of the Bible which corresponds with their observation and experience, and which harmonizes with their reasouings, they do indeed believe; not because it is the Bible, but truth evidenced to them by other means. Beyond this, their faith does not extend.

Where such persons assume the office of Biblical interpreters, it is evidently with great hazard to the interests of evangelical truth. Even if they exercise this office with the greatest honesty, they will be liable to lean constantly to their own understandings, and explain that which lies beyond the sphere of their personal experience and observation, not by the established and legitimate principles of language, but by their own preconceived and limited views; and often by their own unfounded conjectures.

A man who deals with the Bible as an uninspired production, and yields to its authority only so far as sustained by what he conceives to be the dictates of enlightened reason; and either denies or explains away all those parts of it which are not of this character; is termed a Rationalist. His highest rule of

faith, is reason. Beyond where unassisted reason can lead, he does not go in his theological opinions.

This class of interpreters understand and explain some of parts of the Bible correctly. But whenever they come to a communication which legitimately expresses a sense that their unassisted reason cannot or does not verify, they stumble. They do not admit such senses to be correct, and feel themselves authorized to adopt some modes of interpretation, however forced or unnatural, which will relieve them from the embarrassment in question.

The distinguishing principle and fundamental error therefore, of the Rationalists, and of their system of interpretation, is the following, namely: That the Bible cannot legitimately express a sense which the reason and experience of the interpreter do not verify. This principle is not openly avowed by many in this country. Perhaps most who adopt it, are not fully aware themselves of being under its influence. But the number who are generally or partially under its influence, is by no means small, and the errors which arise and are sustained by this means, are not few or harmless. They are both numerous and hurtful in the highest degrees.

Under the influence of this principle, men find only such meanings in the Bible as are verified by their experience and reason. More than this, they suppose it cannot express, and more than this they do not allow it in any case to signify.

In pursuance of this plan, therefore, different persons find sentiments and facts utterly diverse from each other, in the same passages; and all fail to per-

ceive many sublime exhibitions of truth, which are developed with the utmost clearness by correct modes of interpretation.

Where the correct interpreter finds a demon, the Rationalist finds only a disease, which human weakness and prejudice have in former ages ascribed to supposed demoniacal influence. Where the correct interpreter finds a Devil, an apostate evil spirit, the active and powerful enemy both of God and man; the Rationalist finds only an evil principle in the human heart, and that, in the view of many, but a slight and unimportant affair. Where the former finds a revelation respecting hell, a place of endless and intolerable anguish, both to fallen spirits and the finally impenitent from among men; the latter recognizes only a temporal infliction of the Divine wrath, described by a figurative allusion to the vale of Hinnom. Where the former finds indubitable evidence of a stupendous miracle, indicating the direct agency of the Almighty, and confirming the authority and words of his servants; the latter often sees only a singular and fortunate concurrence of ordinary events, tending strongly to impress the minds of beholders, but affording no decisive evidence of the direct and special interposition of God.

This method of interpretation is not improperly denominated the Rationalistic. It is founded on a mistaken view of the legitimate provinces of reason and revelation; or rather on a virtual denial of any supernatural revelation at all.

The Rationalists are the more dangerous, because they profess to establish their sentiments, whatever

they are, by the Bible, when their fundamental principle of interpretation is utterly erroneous, and one that cannot be allowed the least influence in determining our apprehensions in respect to the Divine communications, without leading to error.

The principle that words cannot legitimately express a sense which the experience and reason of the interpreter do not verify, is not pretended to be applicable to the ordinary productions of men. Not only are men known to express in their communications, ideas which cannot be thus verified; but also such as are absolutely false. With this fact before us, we are compelled to interpret their communications by the obvious and established laws of language, whatever may be the relation of what they assert to our experience and reason, or to truth itself. The contrariety of an assertion in the productions of men, to any opinions or even knowledge of ours, is not a sufficient reason for putting on that assertion any construction, or interpreting it in any sense not authorized by the established and obvious principles of language. This principle is generally acknowledged in respect to the productions of men, and it is equally true and important in respect to the Bible.

The Rationalistic mode of interpretation is shown to be erroneous by the following considerations, namely:

(1.) It is inconsistent with the nature and design of the Bible, as a supernatural communication of Divine truth.

(2.) It implies an undue extension of the province

of reason and experience, in this department of human knowledge.

(3.) It introduces a rule for interpreting the higher and more difficult portions of the Bible, which is utterly unsettled and contradictory, the preconceived opinions of men.

1. It is inconsistent with the nature and design of the Bible, as a supernatural communication of Divine truth. The Bible is in its very nature a rule of faith of the highest order. It is an independent source of knowledge, by which God has undertaken to correct the errors and supply the deficiencies of reason and experience. It is of itself alone, an independent witness, of a character so high, and so entitled to confidence, that it does not need the confirmation of collateral evidence to make its declarations certain, however strange, and singular, and surprising some of them may appear.

The assumption therefore, that the Bible cannot, in any part of it, express a credible sense in which it is not confirmed by the experience and reason of the interpreter, is inconsistent with its nature and design, and consequently erroneous. Such an assumption places the Bible on the low footing of a fallible witness, whose testimony is good for nothing when standing alone, but is rendered valid by the agreeing testimony of another. The testimony of the Bible is not to be compared to that of a single witness in court, which requires other collateral evidence to make it decisive; but rather to that of a multitude of witnesses, so great and so disinterested, so intelligent and harmonious, and of such unquestionable

veracity, as to establish, beyond contradiction or cavil, the most surprising and unaccountable facts. This view of the Bible, admitting it to be a source of knowledge independent of all others, and sufficient for the establishment of any position to which its evidence is clearly afforded, is firmly based on the doctrine of its Divine authority and inspiration. It is fatal therefore, to any system of Interpretation or of doctrine, incompatible with it.

2. The Rationalistic mode of interpretation implies an undue extention of the province of reason and experience, in this department of human knowledge. Reason, considered as a faculty of the mind, denotes that power by which we infer one truth from another. All that knowledge which is the result of comparison and inference, is gained solely by the exercise of this faculty. Reason therefore, is one of the original sources of human knowledge. It is not however, a primary one. Perception, consciousness and testimony, are of a more fundamental character, and supply reason itself with materials which are indispensable to its successful exercise. Reason has its appropriate sphere, within which it is the sole umpire of truth. In this sphere its legitimate and unbiased decisions are certain, and in many cases alone.

The appropriate sphere of reason is extended. It embraces all the truths of perception, consciousness, and testimony, as the means of ascent to those which are still higher and less accessible. But its concuring testimony is not necessary for the establishment of these elementary truths. They are introduced to

the mind by their appropriate channels, and established without the aid of reason, by their respective sources of evidence. Those of perception are introduced and established by perception; those of consciousness, by consciousness; and those of testimony, by testimony.

These different means of knowledge, legitimately and rightly used, cannot contradict each other, because truth is not contradictory. If it were, they could and would. Whenever they are so used as to become contradictory, we have evidence in that fact that they are used improperly; and are admonished at once to examine the modes in which contradictory results have been attained, with a view to ascertain and correct those results, by correcting the erroneous mental process which produced them.

The Bible occupies the department of testimony. Within the limits of that department, and interpreted according to the legitimate principles and laws of language, its indications of truth are incontrovertible and certain. To reject any of them, or explain them away, in violation of the established principles and laws of language, because they have not the concurring support of the reason or experience of the interpreter, is to extend reason and experience beyond their proper limits, to the prejudice of another equally certain and decisive means of information. On this ground therefore, the Rationalistic mode of Interpretation is shown to be erroneous, and ought to be rejected and discountenanced.

3. The Rationalistic mode of interpretation introduces a rule for the explanation of the more difficult

and important portions of the Bible, which is utterly unsettled and contradictory; the preconceived and uncertain opinions of men. It not only limits the disclosures of Divine truth to the sphere of merely human knowledge, by which much of the Bible is wrested from its obvious import, but assigns to preconceived opinion and plausible conjecture, in regard to religious subjects, an authority, which it denies to the most explicit declarations of the word of God.

Knowledge, from whatever source derived, contributes to promote the correct interpretation of the Scriptures. All interpretations which represent the Bible as contradictory to our certain knowledge, must be wrong. God does not teach one thing by the objects of perception, consciousness, and reason, and the opposite by direct revelation. But he does communicate by the joint use of all the different modes of instruction, different parts of one great harmonious system of truth. Every part of this system, rightly understood, is in agreement with every other. Accurate and certain knowledge derived from any one source of information, contributes essentially to facilitate the acquisition of related truths derived from others. Indications of truth, both in the Bible and elsewhere, which would otherwise be obscure, are often rendered perspicuous by means of related knowledge, derived from other sources. On the same principle, the perceptions of one sense contribute to render those of another determinate and satisfactory. The perceptions of touch often correct those of sight, when they would otherwise

be indefinite or erroneous; and those of sight, the kindred perceptions of hearing, &c.

The certainty of knowledge is generally increased when the same truth is demonstrated by different and independent sources of evidence. But the uncertain and conjectural conclusions, derived from one source of information, may not be allowed in any way to limit or modify, much less to contradict, the unequivocal indications of truth, by any other means.

The opinions which are derived from the ordinary sources of information, in respect to religious subjects, are obviously vague and conjectural. Unless we are allowed to go to the Bible as a depository of certain knowledge, capable of making wise the ignorant, and of establishing to the conviction of every well regulated mind, truths which are utterly unattainable by other means, our possession of this volume seems, so far as faith is concerned, to be of very little consequence or utility.

Different interpreters entering upon the study of it, with different degrees of human knowledge, and with different preconceived opinions on many of the subjects to which it relates, will find in it different and contradictory senses, according to their previous knowledge and opinions.

But what authority have we for applying an uncertain rule of interpretation to the explanation of the inspired records? Have we Scriptural authority for it? None. Has this rule any adequate foundation in reason? None. What could have induced our benevolent Creator to give us any inspired com-

munications at all, unless he constructed them according to definite and certain rules?

But if these communications are capable of being interpreted by certain and definite rules, that in question is not one of them, for it is manifestly and necessarily indefinite and uncertain.

Much of the error that has prevailed in former times, and which continues at this moment to receive the confidence of misguided multitudes, has arisen from a Rationalistic principle of interpretation. Many who are not Rationalists, some who are hopefully pious, through neglect to inform themselves on this subject, have allowed the supposed dictates of perception and reason to come in unauthorized and prevailing collision with the responses of the Holy Spirit; and by applying erroneous human opinions to the interpretation of some parts of the Bible, have greatly erred from the simplicity and and purity of the gospel faith, and greatly impeded the progress and triumphs of truth and piety, over human ignorance and perverseness.

Sec. 2. The mystical mode of biblical interpretation.

The word Mystical denotes (1.) obscure, hid; (2.) remote from human observation; (3.) of a mysterious allegorical, or emblematical import. As applied in the title of this section, it is used to designate a mode of Interpretation, in which the obvious and natural import of words and phrases, is superceded by less obvious and allegorical or emblematical sig-

nifications, not indicated by the manifest and established laws of language.

Many who are generally correct in respect to their modes of Biblical Interpretation occasionally err by adopting some modification of that now to be considered. Some adopt it in a few instances, and some in many, who discard it in other cases. A few in almost every successive age of the church, have adopted it generally in their study and exposition of the Bible; and have received extensively the denomination of Mystics. Multitudes, however, are occasionally, and in some degree mystical in their interpretations, who are not properly Mystics; and many perhaps are properly Mystics, who are not conscious of it themselves, and have never been so considered and denominated by others.

The Mystical mode of interpretation is in most respects the very opposite of the Rationalistic. The latter falls below the true sense of those portions of the Bible to which it is applied; the former rises above, and goes beyond it. The latter is erroneous in consequence of too great an extension of the office and authority of reason; the former by the introduction of a different, foreign, and often opposing element, equally impertinent and delusive.

Rationalistic interpretation is the natural offspring and ally of infidelity; mystic bears a corresponding relation to enthusiasm, fanaticism, and superstition. Both have greatly impeded the diffusion of the truth, and retarded the progress and establishment of the Christian religion, in ancient and modern times. Both however, in some of their applications

are often found in an unnatural and disastrous alliance with genuine, humble, and sober piety.

The principal varieties of Mystic Interpretation may be included under the following heads, namely; (1.) the allegorical; (2.) the doctrinal; (3.) the sentimental; (4.) the speculative and philosophical.

These modes of Interpretation possess considerable and obvious diversity of character, but they have a general resemblance or analogy to each other, in consequence of which, they are here classed under the same generic head, and admit of being refuted by the same general course of argument.

1. *The allegorical.* This variety of Mystical interpretation consists in putting an allegorical construction on parts of the Bible which are not of an allegorical nature. It was practiced to some extent among the Jews previous to the Christian era. Instances of it occur in Josephus and Philo, Jewish writers who lived near the time of Christ. It was early adopted by some of the leading writers of the Christian church, and extensively disseminated by their means. Origen went further into allegorical expositions of this kind, than any who preceded him; and by reason of his extensive learning, superior genius, and indefatigable industry in the exposition of the Scriptures, exerted a powerful and extensive influence in favor of his peculiar sentiments on this as on other subjects.

Having embraced the Platonic idea, that this world is strictly and universally emblematical of that which is invisible, and that the objects and events of one correspond to those of the other, he was natu-

rally induced to search for symbolical descriptions of invisible realities, in the historical narratives of earthly objects, which occur in the Bible generally.

He attributed to the Scriptures generally, a double or treble sense; one, that which is indicated by the ordinary laws of Interpretation; the others, concealed symbolical or figurative ones, to be developed by higher principles.

Emmanuel Swedenborg has more recently revived and remodeled the Mystic system of Interpretation adopted by the ancients, and has gained some adherents to the belief, that the Scriptures have three independent and collateral senses, the literal, spiritual, and celestial.

The Mystical mode of Interpretation, as embraced by Origen and Swedenborg, is founded on the assumption that there is such a correspondence between material and spiritual, terrestrial and celestial objects and events, as to make the former correct and adequate types or symbols of the latter.

This supposed resemblance is called the doctrine of correspondences. To the extent however, which is assumed by these interpreters, that doctrine is without any foundation in Scripture or reason. The Bible does not assert it; neither is it clearly implied in any thing which the Bible contains. The figurative language and material symbols of the Bible are authorized by the principle of general analogies, and do not require an assumption so extravagant as that in question, to justify the use of them.

Earth resembles heaven; body, mind; the sun, God; and light, knowledge, &c. just as far as these

respective objects possess common properties and relations, and no farther. The same may be said of all other objects which are referred to in the figurative or symbolical communications of the Bible.

The allegorical systems of Origen and Swedenborg, fall to the ground for the want of any decisive evidence to sustain them. They are ingenious and facinating; but they are not built on the rock, and cannot withstand the trial of sober and enlightened scrutiny.

The principle, than which none is more obvious and important, that we may not in any case impose allegorical or symbolical senses on the Scriptures, any more than on other communications, without clear and manifest indications of such usage, binds us indissolubly to the true theory on this subject. Faithfully applied and carried out, it restrains us from any unauthorized interpretations of the kind which have now been specified.

Slight deviations however, into the track of mystycal allegory, through a neglect of this principle, are not uncommon in many of the best writers; and are often indulged by the ignorant with the most injurious and unlicensed freedom.

2. *The doctrinal.* Those may not improperly be termed doctrinal Mystics, who deviate from the right understanding and exposition of the Scriptures, by giving an undue prominence to some of their doctrines, and making an unauthorized use of them in Biblical Interpretation. Some are not satisfied with finding particular doctrines occupying their appropriate places in the Bible. They wish to find them

in every part of it; and are unwilling to acknowledge the existence of other doctrines, revealed with equal clearness, because of some supposed discrepancy between them and their favorite doctrinal opinions. Errors from this source are almost innumerable. Many excellent and intelligent persons are not altogether free from them. Mystics of the worst character have achieved their greatest victories over the truth, in this field. It is a moral aceldama, a field of blood, where the mighty have fallen with the temporary fall of truth, which they have struggled hard, and for a time successfully, to overcome.

Almost every class of fanatics and enthusiasts have distinguished themselves in this field of erroneous interpretation. It is characteristic of the enthusiast to look at one real or supposed truth, or class of truths, till he loses the capacity of seeing or appreciating others. It is impossible for such a one rightly to interpret the Bible. Its truths are various. They require to be looked upon with a sound and steady eye, and to be analyzed with a calm and steady hand. They cannot be seen with clearness in their due proportions and relations, under any other conditions.

3. *The sentimental.* Those may be denominated sentimental Mystics, who suffer themselves to be controlled in the interpretation of the Bible by their own supposed supernatural impressions in regard to it. A misunderstanding of the Scripture doctrine respecting Divine influence and illumination, has greatly contributed to delusions of this kind. An

inexplicable impression is with many a sufficient reason for unhesitating confidence.

Such persons would do well to consider that we are required not to believe every spirit, but to try the spirits, whether they be of God. 1 John iv. 1. Our impressions are not infallible, even in our holiest states of mind. They need to be brought to the test of Scripture, and their character impartially determined at that tribunal, before they can be worthy to be cherished with confidence, or to be regarded as of the least authority, in determining our religious belief respecting other matters.

4. *The speculative and philosophical.* A speculative or philosophical Mystic, is one who suffers his speculative and philosophical opinions to exert an undue influence in determining his apprehensions of Bible truth. Many of the ancient Mystics were of this class. Their interpretations of the Bible were rendered utterly erroneous, by an erroneous philosophy. Had their philosophical speculations been correct, or had they strenuously preserved their minds from being unduly biased in their interpretations of the Bible, by those speculations, they might have avoided many hurtful errors into which they fell, and have apprehended with clearness many glorious truths, to which they never attained.

The reign of false philosophy has been long and disastrous. No man can be in any degree acquainted with its history, without receiving painful conviction of its prevalence, both over the dictates of human reason, and the unambiguous testimony of the word of God.

Would that the history of its unhappy prevalence was exclusively that of the past. But this is far from being the case. False philosophy, in its more refined and deceptive varieties, still sways a powerful scepter, and occupies a strongly guarded throne. It exerts an influence with thousands, to darken that which is even luminous in the Bible, and perplex that which is obscure.

The Mystical mode of interpretation, as exhibited in this article, is like the beast of the Apocalypse, having many heads and more horns; and like him too, is the fierce antagonist of her, whose sun-clad form and starry crown, betoken her the joy of the earth and the favorite of heaven.

(1.) In all its varieties, it is inconsistent with the established principles and laws of language, and leads to manifest violations of them. On this ground therefore, it ought to be rejected.

(2.) It is not authorized by the Bible itself. There is no passage in the sacred volume which directs us to explain it by any other than the natural and obvious principles of language. Among those principles the mystical element is not to be found.

The origin and history of this mode of interpretation, are against it. It cannot be traced to the schools of the prophets, or to the communications of the Bible. The later inspired writers often quote from the productions of their inspired predecessors, and comment upon the words thus introduced; but they do not, in all their expositions of earlier Scripture, develope any other mode of interpretation, than that which is based on the common and established prin-

ciples of human language. Much less do they enroll among their laws of interpretation either of the Mystic principles which have been exhibited in the present section. These principles are not established by any Scriptural precept, or any Divinely authorized example. Authentic history has traced them to the instructions of Jewish Rabbis', who made void the law of God by their puerile and absurd traditions; and to the schools of heathen philosophy, whose very light was the refined darkness of Paganism; but it has been unable to discover for them a nobler and less suspicious genealogy. Christ was not a Mystic. The apostles adhered to the established and universal principles of Interpretation, both in relating the inimitable discourses of our Lord, and in commenting upon them; in their history of the origin and early progress of the Christian church; and in their expositions of its institutions and doctrines. From the course which is thus indicated by Scriptural example, with no Scriptural precept for our guide, we may not innocently or safely depart. The Mystic mode of interpretation, involving a departure from that course so fully authorized both by Scripture and reason, is manifestly erroneous, and the adoption of it proves injurious to the interests both of truth and piety.

If God had intended that the Bible should be interpreted in mystical senses, or in any other not indicated by the known principles of language, he doubtless would have given unequivocal evidence of this fact. But he has not done so. We therefore

conclude with confidence, that he had no intention of this kind.

(3.) The Mystical mode of interpretation is injurious to the interests of religion, in leading persons to neglect and undervalue the plain and obvious sense of many parts of the Bible. In the Bible, interpreted according to the established principles and laws of language, are treasured up the unquestionable doctrines and duties of the Christian religion. No valuable additions can be made to these, by mystical interpretations. Not a valuable doctrine, not an obvious and important duty, can be discovered by mystical interpretations, which cannot be fully demonstrated by other means. All the doctrines and duties which are needful for the promotion of personal holiness, are fully developed by the other and unquestionable modes of Biblical Interpretation. If the study of these doctrines, and the practice of these duties are properly attended to and prosecuted, religion will prosper. If they are neglected, it will inevitably decline. In leading to an undervaluation and neglect of them, Mystical interpretation has proved exceedingly injurious, and brought forth the manifest fruits of delusion, sin and death. Inasmuch as a tree is known by its fruits, that mode of interpretation which leads inevitably to the rejection of certain truth, and to the neglect of manifest duty, must be wrong.

With correct modes of interpretation, persons may fall into error, in respect to difficult words and paragraphs. But their errors will be occasional and vincible. Under the guidance of erroneous princi-

ples, however, like those which have been specified in this chapter, erroneous interpretations are greatly multiplied. They occur not only in respect to passages which are really obscure and difficult, but in respect to those which would otherwise be of the plainest and most obvious import.

Right modes of interpretation may, through inattention or ignorance, conduct to error; but those which are fundamentally wrong, are the more fatal to the interests of truth, the more faithfully and intelligently they are applied. They are often used with surprising skill, and operate with tremenduous effect, both in obscuring the vision of those who use them, and in deceiving others. If a man has fallen into doctrinal errors by means of a Rationalistic or Mystic mode of interpretation, it is generally in vain to endeavor to correct them, till he is made sensible of the fallacy of those principles by which he is misled. While that fallacy is unperceived, he builds with confidence on his sandy foundation; and not till it is swept away, can he be forced to abandon the often well wrought but misplaced fabric of his soul's regard.

Then he sees his error, not by discovering the imperfection and inconclusiveness of the argument which betrayed him into it. That argument perhaps was perfect. But by discovering the incorrectness of the assumption on which the fatal argument was founded. The moment he makes that discovery, all that before was perplexed, becomes plain, and the errors which appeared invincible, are instantly detected and renounced.

Let every man therefore, prove his own work, and examine thoroughly the principles and rules of interpretation which he adopts, and his mode of applying them to the sacred writings. An error in respect to either, may lead to numberless related and consequent errors, of the most injurious nature.

NOTES.

1. For a confirmation of the foregoing statements in respect to Origen, and for a more particular account of his character and modes of interpretation, the reader is referred to Murdock's translation of Mosheim, Vol. I. pages 198, 216—217, 219—221.

2 .Within the last year or two, several important contributions have been made to that department of Biblical literature to which the present work appertains. But none have come to the knowledge of the author, which accomplish the design he has had in view, and to which his efforts have been humbly but earnestly directed in the preceding investigation, namely: That of furnishing a complete manual of this interesting science, adapted to the existing state of knowledge and opinion on this subject, and designed for common as well as scientific and theological use. If the principles of this work are correct, they are of paramount importance to all men, and ought to be the object of general inquiry and investigation, with those of every age and condition in life.

THE END.

Date Loaned
