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MR. HODGE'S

DISSERTATION

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BIBLICAL LITERATURE.



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DISSERTATION,



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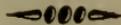
OF

BIBLICAL LITERATURE.

BY

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IN THE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY OF THE PRES-
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ADVERTISEMENT.



TOWARD the close of December last, a Society was formed, in the Theological Seminary, at Princeton, for improvement in Biblical Literature. The exercises of this Society, are of two kinds ; the first consisting in dissertations on important subjects connected with Biblical Literature ; the second in translations and expositions of Sacred Scripture. These exercises are performed by the members in alphabetical order. The Constitution of the Society made it the duty of the President to read the first dissertation. It was in obedience to this requisition that the following discourse was hastily prepared. Since that time, it has been considerably enlarged : in other respects, little alteration has been made.

The thought of publishing this address would never have entered the mind of the writer, had not the suggestion been made by the gentlemen, whom of all others, he is most inclined to respect. He hopes it may be viewed in the light, in which the circumstances of the case are calculated to present it ; as merely intended, to give the members of an infant society, some general view of an interesting department of their studies ; and to offer some considerations calculated to secure for it their diligent attention.

Princeton, March, 1822:

DISSERTATION, &c.

THE constitution of our Society requires the President to read an address, or dissertation, at the first stated meeting in each session. With the view of discharging this duty, I have selected The Importance of Biblical Literature, as the subject of the following discourse.

It will be necessary in order to the proper consideration of this subject, to gain some definite idea of what is meant by Biblical Literature. My object, therefore, in the first place, will be to state, as far as I am able, the general outlines of this department of Theological learning.

Biblical Literature is usually divided into two great parts, denominated *Criticism*, and *Inter-*

pretation, or Hermeneutics. The object of the former, is *to determine what is the genuine text of sacred scripture*; of the latter, *to discover and exhibit its meaning.*

The series of Books which compose the Sacred Volume, were written at different times, during a period of sixteen hundred years. The latest of these productions, therefore, have come down to us through a series of more than seventeen centuries; and the earliest, have been preserved for more than three thousand years. During this long period, they have undergone innumerable transcriptions in almost every part of the world, and by every description of persons. We find, from our own experience, that it is difficult to transcribe a single page without making some mistake, and that to transcribe a volume without an error, would be almost impossible. That the Sacred Scriptures, therefore, should have been exempted from all errors of this nature, would have required a miraculous superintendence of every one who undertook to transcribe them. We have the most convincing proof, that no such miraculous influence, has ever been granted. It has been found, on the collation of the numerous manuscripts still

extant, and on the examination of other sources of information, that the number of discrepancies is very great, and indeed at first view appalling. It becomes, therefore, a matter of great difficulty and importance, to determine, amidst this vast multitude, which is the true reading, and to fix with certainty the text which proceeded from the sacred penmen.

The importance of this subject is such that it early forced itself on the attention of the friends of revelation. Even as early as the time of *Origen*, the discrepancies between the several copies of the Septuagint, were so numerous and serious, that he was induced to devote more than twenty-eight years of his life, to a laborious attempt to restore its purity, and bring it to a nearer coincidence with the Hebrew. In this department of sacred criticism, he was followed by *Lucian*, of *Antioch*, and *Hesychius*, of *Egypt*, whose revised editions became the standard copies of their respective countries, and seem to have included the New-Testament as well as the Septuagint.

The same disagreement which *Origen* had found in the Greek scriptures, *Jerome* complains of in the Latin. As this ancient version had been made from the Septuagint, which was

then the standard, both of the eastern and western churches, *Jerome* at first, had courage to attempt nothing more, than a correction of this translation, from the improved text of the Greek scriptures, furnished by the labours of *Origen*. But his manuscripts being lost, or destroyed, he embraced the bolder resolution of making a version, from the Hebrew Text itself. This translation, about the year six hundred, received the sanction of the Bishop of *Rome*, and became the standard of the Roman Church.

Previously to the time of *Jerome*, though at what precise period is unknown, the Jews had begun to devote much attention to the cultivation of the Hebrew language, and the preservation of their sacred writings. The two principal seats of their learning, were *Tiberias*, for the western Jews, and *Babylon*, for the eastern. At the former of these places was composed the *Jerusalem Talmud*, at the latter, the *Babylonish*; containing the traditionary law of the Jews, with the comments of their doctors. But what, at present, we are more interested in, is the incredible labour they devoted to fix the text of the Hebrew scriptures, and to preserve it immaculate. The *Masora*, which is one of the most surprising monuments of human indus-

try, contains the result of their labours. It embraces the criticisms on the text, which had been handed down from their ancestors; the most minute details respecting the size, form, and position of the letters; the number of letters in each book, and in the whole Bible; how often each letter occurs; and the rules to be observed, in transcribing the sacred volume; in short, nothing seems to have been omitted, which ingenuity and industry could devise and accomplish, to preserve the Hebrew Scriptures from the slightest alteration. When these Jews were driven from the east, they carried with them to the southern parts of Spain, their fondness for Biblical criticism, and rendered the twelfth century famous, by the writings of *Maimonides, Aben Ezra, David Kimchi, &c.*

Such was the effect of the labours of the *Masorites*, that the Jews generally imbibed the belief of the perfect exemption of the Hebrew Bible, from all errors in letters, points, and accents. On the revival of Hebrew literature among the christians, shortly before the Reformation, the same belief of the immaculate purity of the sacred text, was embraced by them. It was not until the Samaritan Pentateuch was discovered, and brought into Europe, in sixteen

hundred and twenty, that much diversity of opinion on this subject seems to have existed. As this copy of the Law of *Moses* was written in the Hebrew language, but without the vowel points, and in the Samaritan character, critics were led to question, the antiquity, both of the Hebrew Points and Letters. As it was still farther observed, that the Samaritan and Hebrew Pentateuchs differed frequently in their readings, *Morinus* was led to infer from this fact, and from the diversity which existed between the Hebrew and the Septuagint, that the former was much corrupted. In the year sixteen hundred and fifty, *Capellus* published his *Critica Sacra*, in which he took the more moderate ground of maintaining, that the Hebrew scriptures had descended to us, with the usual inaccuracies attendant on all works frequently transcribed. The opposition made to these sentiments, by *Buxtorf*, and others, was of the most serious kind. The doctrines of *Capellus* however, were soon adopted by *Walton*, and since that period, have rapidly gained ground. The prevalence of these opinions, naturally gave rise to the desire of knowing the actual state of the Hebrew Text, and the amount of the diversity which really existed. This led to the pub-

lication of *Kennicott's* celebrated edition of the Hebrew Bible, formed from an extensive collation of manuscripts both in *England* and on the continent. This work was finally completed in seventeen hundred and eighty, attended with an immense number of various readings, though few of them are of the least importance. This collection has been considerably increased by the labours of *De Rossi*, who has been followed by *J. D. Michaelis*, and *Eichhorn* in this department.

The high idea entertained of the purity of the Hebrew Text, was to a considerable extent, transferred to the received text of the New-Testament, which was supposed by christians generally, to be as free from all imperfection, as the Holy Religion it recorded. This text became fixed in the *Elzevir* edition of sixteen hundred and twenty-four. The history of the formation of the *Received Text*, as exhibited in this edition, is thus briefly summed up by *Griesbach* on page forty-two of his *Prolegomena*.
 “The *Elzevir* edition was formed from that of
 “*Beza*, and the third of *Stephens*. *Beza* fol-
 “lowed the third of *Stephens*, with very few
 “alterations. This edition of *Stephens*, was the

“ fifth of *Erasmus* reprinted, with the exception
 “ of the few instances in which he preferred the
 “ *Complutensian*. *Erasmus* formed his text,
 “ from a few modern manuscripts, with the as-
 “ sistance of the Latin Vulgate, and the writ-
 “ ings of a few of the Fathers inaccurately
 “ edited.*

Shortly after the formation of the Received Text, in the *Elzevir* edition in sixteen hundred and twenty-four, Biblical Literature received a considerable accession, in the publication of *Walton's Polyglott*, and subsequently of *Father Simon's Critical Histories* of the Old Testament and New Testaments. The attention bestowed on this subject, gradually increased, and the number of discrepancies was found to be more and more considerable. *The Received Text* was gradually obtaining the sanctity of age, and the authority of long continued acceptance, when the christian world was aroused by the

* *Griesbach* very properly remarks, that no edition is entitled to any authority of itself, but is to be estimated by the value of the materials from which it was formed. It has providentially happened, according to the opinion of later critics, that the manuscripts whence *Erasmus*, and the other early editors, formed their editions, belong to the very class, which of all others is of the most value, and that therefore the Received Text is better entitled to our confidence than any other which has yet been formed.

appearance of the edition of *Dr. Mill*, with its thirty thousand various readings. The subject now assumed so serious an aspect, that the enemies of the truth stood in wishful expectation, to see the very foundation of the church undermined, and the pious were turning themselves to God as their last refuge. As this subject, for a time, almost engrossed the attention of christendom, it was pursued with the greatest ardour. The materials of this science, have thus not only been greatly increased, but reduced to the order of a regular system, by the labours, of *Wetstein*, *Bengel*, *Semler*, and especially of *Griesbach*. Although the various readings have been made to amount to no less than one hundred and fifty thousand, yet, since it has been found, that rules or criteria could easily be determined upon, whose application, would decide, in almost every important instance, which was the original reading, and that the vast majority of these discrepancies were of no importance, relating to mere differences of orthography, arrangement of words, or other trivial particulars, the hopes and fears of the enemies, and the friends of the truth, have alike

subsided, and the church with more confidence than ever can exclaim—*Verbum Dei manet in æternum.**

It surely will not be considered, an unreasonable requisition, that we review the course of this investigation, and follow the steps which have led to this delightful result; that we carefully consider the evidence, that the Bible we now have, is essentially the Bible, which proceeded from the sacred writers. To lead us over this course, and exhibit this evidence, is the office of Sacred Criticism. As this is a subject of great interest, and importance, it is also one of considerable extent, requiring,

I. As it regards the OLD TESTAMENT, a history of the sacred text, through different periods, from its formation, to the present day, including an account of the manner in which the several Books were originally written, compiled, and preserved, and the various means devised for maintaining, or restoring their purity.

The first point of interest on this subject, is the consideration of the question, respecting the

* It should be stated, that these errors do not affect the Integrity of the Text. Because, in almost every instance, they are the mere mistakes of transcribers; and the *true reading*, though lost in one copy, is preserved in another.

purity of the Hebrew Text ; and having come to the conclusion now universally admitted, that there is no such thing as a text immaculately pure, to inquire into the various sources of the errors found to exist, and to arrange them in their proper classes.

Our second object should be, the consideration of the means by which the purity of the text may be restored. This requires a knowledge of the sources whence its original state is to be learnt, such as ancient *manuscripts*, *versions*, and *quotations*.

With regard to *Manuscripts*, we must learn the circumstances by which their comparative authority is to be determined ; as their antiquity, the care with which they have been written, and preserved, and the particular family or class to which they belong.

The consideration of the *Ancient Versions*, leads us into the extensive history of the LXX. Whether this version derived its name from the belief, that seventy-two persons were engaged in the translation, or from its being made under the sanction of the council of seventy elders, is uncertain. It is strongly recommended to our attention, by its high antiquity ; by the authority it so long maintained both in the Jewish and

christian church ; by the influence it has had on the style of the New Testament ; and its importance in ascertaining the ancient readings of the Old. The other versions of importance, are the Greek translations, of *Aquila*, *Symmachus*, and *Theodotion*,—the ancient *Latin*, the *Syriac* and the *Chaldee Paraphrases*, or *Jewish Targums*. Each of these versions is considered, as in some measure exhibiting the text, at the period in which they were respectively made.

In this connection should be mentioned, the *Samaritan Pentateuch*, which is the Hebrew Text in the Samaritan character, and as is generally supposed, the ancient Hebrew character. As this *Pentateuch*, has come down, through a channel entirely distinct, from that by which the Jewish Scriptures have been received, and as it has had considerable influence in regulating the course of Sacred Criticism, it becomes one of the most interesting documents connected with this subject.

The principal *Quotations* of importance, from the Hebrew Scriptures, are to be found, in the *Jewish Talmuds*. In addition to these sources of information, should be mentioned, the *Masora*, which contains the critical apparatus of the Jews, for restoring and preserving the purity of the text.

After attending to these various means of arriving at a knowledge of the original state of the Hebrew Scriptures, we are next to consider their relative value, and the rules to be adopted in selecting from the various readings they afford.

And, finally, we are to review the history of the actual application of these means, to the restoration of the text, which involves an account of the early critical labours of the Jews, and the subsequent labours of christians, which can only be given in an account of the various critical editions of the Hebrew Bible.

II. When we turn to the Criticism of the NEW TESTAMENT, we meet a subject of far greater extent, and importance, although we shall have the same general course to pursue; examining first, the sources of the errors, secondly, the means of their correction, and thirdly, the history of the application of these means.

Most of the sources of error, which affected the Old Testament, have also operated on the New, and many of them to a much greater extent; because the New Testament was more widely diffused, more frequently, and less carefully transcribed. The attention the Jews devoted to the correctness of their manuscripts,

was carried to a superstitious extent. The rules which they prescribed to their transcribers, embraced the most minute particulars, such as, the size and form of the letters, the number to be comprised in each line, their distance from each other, &c. This laborious attention, joined with the influence exerted by the predictions of their Rabins, as to the result of the least mistake, produced a degree of scrupulous care, which was never extended to the books of the New Testament. This circumstance, together with the great multiplication of the copies of the New Testament, would lead us to expect, that the discrepancies between these copies would be more serious, than the various readings of the Old Testament.

The means of correcting whatever errors really may exist, and of arriving at the knowledge of the original text, may again be referred to the several heads of *manuscripts, versions, and quotations.*

In estimating the value of *Manuscripts* we must, as before, attend to their antiquity; the care with which they were written; their purity, or freedom from corrections or interpolations; and the class to which they belong. This last subject, rises into incalculable importance,

from the fact, that critics do not hesitate to merge one hundred manuscripts into one testimony, and to make one counter-balance an hundred, according to the particular class to which they belong. In other words, in judging of any particular reading, the number of individual manuscripts is hardly taken into the account; the only question is, by how many classes or recensions is it supported? as these only are considered as independent witnesses. For this, there is clearly important reason, since it would be as improper to adduce as separate testimony, the several transcripts of the same manuscript, as the several copies of the same edition of any printed work. But the difficulty lies, in finding sufficient criteria for separating the several manuscripts into their distinct classes. There is certainly danger of exalting to the rank of independent witnesses, those which are not entitled to this authority. *Bengel* first proposed this principle of classification. He was followed by *Semler*, and afterwards by *Griesbach*. These critics, observing among the numerous various readings exhibited by existing manuscripts, that in characteristic readings many of them agreed, and that this coincidence was so marked, that it could not have been fortuitous, the

manuscripts thus agreeing, they referred to the same class, family, or recension. And they still farther remarked, that those manuscripts which agree in their characteristic readings, came from the same country, and coincide with the several versions, and with the writings of the Fathers, which belong to their respective districts. Hence these recensions, are called the *Western* ; the *Alexandrine* and the *Byzantine*, as prevailing in these several sections of the church. This is *Griesbach's* distribution. The manuscripts belonging to the two former of these classes, are extremely few, yet on the supposition that they are separate and independent witnesses, these few in case of their coincidence, are made to outweigh the multitude which belong to the *Byzantine* division. It is on this coincidence that the authority of *Griesbach's* text is founded. It is plain, therefore, that this authority may be destroyed, either by shewing, that there is no sufficient ground, for thus separating manuscripts into distinct classes, which was the opinion of *Matthæi*, and other distinguished men, and which is the *tendency* of a great part of *Dr. Laurence's* Essay on this subject ; or, admitting that there is good reason for this classification, by shewing that some of

these witnesses are unworthy of credit. This *Mr. Nolan* has attempted in his work on the Integrity of the Greek Vulgate. His object was to prove, that the *Byzantine* text, which is that followed in the Received Text of the New Testament, is the only one which has come down uncorrupted, and supported by the uniform traditional testimony of the church. Instead of calling the first two classes *Western* and *Alexandrine*, he calls them *Egyptian*, and *Palestine*, and gives (page 105) a satisfactory reason for the prevalence of the first in the Western church, and of the second in *Alexandria*. By thus changing the birth place of these two recensions, he is enabled to give an historical account of their origin. The Egyptian Text he ascribes to the revision of *Hesychius*, the Palestine to that of *Eusebius*. The Byzantine was edited by *Lucianus*. The last mentioned editor, he supposes, published the then authorized text, without alteration; whereas both the others corrected their copies agreeably to their own views, and to the state of opinion in their respective countries, with which he shews they very strikingly correspond. In thus assigning to *Griesbach's* two most important classes, a recent origin, and endeavouring to fix on them

the charge of systematic corruption, he has attempted to undermine the authority of his principles for settling the text. How far he has succeeded in this attempt, must be left for others to decide: it may, however, be safely asserted, that enough has been accomplished, to make the friends of truth hesitate to acknowledge the exclusive authority of a text, which is the result of so questionable a system.

After the *Manuscripts*, the next source of information, are the early *Versions*, of which the most important, are the Syriac, the Old Latin or Italick, the Sahidic, and the Latin Vulgate. Each of these is made to contribute an important part in settling the sacred text. The history of each, therefore, calls for our serious attention.

Quotations from the New Testament in the early Fathers, is the third source, and one which has given rise to much discussion, and exerted great influence on the theories of eminent critics. It is one, also, of peculiar difficulty, owing to the loose, memoriter manner in which these quotations were frequently made.

After considering these sources of information as to the original state of the sacred text; we are next to attend to the rules by which we are to be governed in our choice of the Various Readings they afford.

To learn what has been done in attempting to restore the purity of the text, we must study the principles on which the most important editions of the New Testament were conducted, and their respective histories, especially those of *Ximenes*, *Erasmus*, *Stephens*, *Mill*, *Wetstein*, and *Griesbach*.

Such is a very imperfect outline of the first division of this subject. Before proceeding to say any thing on *Interpretation*, I would mention two or three subjects, on which our minds should be previously made up viz. the Canonical authority, the Genuineness, and the Inspiration, of the Sacred Scriptures.

With respect to the first, it is evidently proper that we know what Books are to be recognized as Scripture, before we proceed to consider the principles on which the sacred writings are to be explained. The consideration of the second subject, is little more than the extension of the application of the principles of Sacred Criticism, ascending from the investigation of the genuineness of particular passages, to the genuineness of entire Books.

The reason for placing the Inspiration of the Sacred Scriptures, in this part of our course is two fold, 1st. that we may study them under the

deep impression that they are the Word of God : and 2dly because it may be found that the divine origin of the Scriptures should exert a considerable influence on the principles by which they are to be interpreted. It is one of the first principles of Interpretation, that in explaining any work respect is to be had to the character of its author. But if the doctrine of the plenary Inspiration be true, God is the real author of the Sacred Scriptures. It is readily admitted, that this fact does not interfere with their having been written according to the common principles of language, which the object they were intended to answer, rendered absolutely necessary. In *translating* the sacred writings, therefore, the principle in question may not exert any great influence ; but when we come to *explain* them, it will be found of essential importance. The rules of Interpretation, which arise out of the divine origin of the Bible, are as clearly ascertained, and as well founded as those which arise from any other source, resting on the authority of the sacred writers themselves. It is from them we learn, that the Old dispensation, was preparatory to the New ; that the Law was “ a shadow of good things to come,” and is to be explained accordingly.

Before entering, therefore, on the second department of this subject, we should be convinced of the canonical authority, authenticity, and inspiration of the Sacred Scriptures, that we may be able to take their divine authority as proved.

I am now to endeavour, briefly to state the course to be pursued in the INTERPRETATION OF THE BIBLE.

And in the first place, we may mention what is either essential, or highly important, in the Interpreter himself. As, first, a knowledge of the languages in which the Bible was originally written. Any one who reads a work in a translation, reads it through a glass darkly. The words and phrases of no two languages exactly correspond; and the indescribable shades of meaning, which words derive from peculiar combinations, it is impossible a version should retain. Without dwelling on this subject, it is sufficient to appeal to the experience of every one acquainted with any two languages whatever. How would the ancient classics be estimated, if judged by a literal translation?

He should also be acquainted with the character and history of the several sacred writers, with the state of opinion in the age in which they lived. This is of peculiar importance in

regard to the New Testament, and includes a knowledge of the sects and opinions of the Jews, of the early christian doctrines, and of the early heresies. He should also be acquainted with the manners and customs, the laws, character, and circumstances of the persons to whom the sacred writings were addressed, their civil history, with that of neighbouring nations, together with whatever light, geography, chronology, natural history, and philosophy, can cast on the Sacred Volume.

The Interpreter of Scripture should be discriminating and cautious; he should be humble and teachable, sensible of his need of divine teaching, and anxious to obtain it. Of all qualifications the most important, are piety, and a firm conviction of the divine origin of the Scriptures: without these we can never enter into the feelings and views of the sacred writers, nor have any proper impressions as to the design of the Bible, and therefore cannot be prepared to expound it.

The first duty of an Interpreter is to become acquainted with the meaning of words, the several classes, into which they are naturally divided, and to become familiar with the general principles of language.

We must next attend to the common acceptation of words and phrases, and the sources of information on this subject : we should enquire into the circumstances by which the import of words and phrases is regulated in all languages; such as the opinions, laws and customs of the people, the peculiar circumstances of this nature, which have influenced the language and modes of expression characteristic of the Bible. Especially we should attend to the peculiar phraseology of the New Testament, the sources whence it has been derived, as the Hebrew origin of the sacred writers, their familiarity with the Septuagint, the influence of their religious sects, and their intercourse with neighbouring nations. We should study the means by which the language of the New Testament is to be illustrated ; such as the writings of co-temporary authors, the phraseology of the Old Testament both in the Greek and Hebrew, and the general character of the eastern idiom.

Having considered these subjects, and fixed in our minds the general principles of Interpretation, whether applicable to all writings, or peculiar to the Sacred Volume, we must attend to the interpretation of figurative language, the connection between the literal and figurative

meaning of words, the circumstances in which the latter is to be resorted to, &c. This will lead to the consideration of the principal figures of speech, such as Metaphor and Allegory, and especially the Parables of our Saviour, which have been as often perverted as any part of the Sacred Volume. It is therefore necessary that we should have distinctly before us the rules by which these figures are to be explained.

These are only preliminary subjects, which lead to the more extensive principles of interpretation, applicable to whole departments of the word of God, as the rules for historical, doctrinal, typical and prophetic Interpretation. The two latter are peculiarly important. We should fix in our minds the precise definition of a Type; learn what persons, institutions, and circumstances of the Old Testament are to be considered as typical; determine whether we are to confine this character to the particular instances specified in the New Testament, or are at liberty to extend it, and how far. With regard to Prophecy, it is unnecessary to say that it will require much laborious study, including two of the most difficult subjects, connected with this whole department, viz—the doctrine of

double sense, and the modes of quotation adopted by the sacred writers of the New Testament. And, finally, we must consider the systems of Interpretation to which the whole Bible has been made to submit, as the Cabbalistic ; the Allegorical ; the Mystical, which either deserts entirely the grammatical sense, or exalts some inward feeling above the word ; the Dogmatical, which makes any system of doctrine an authoritative rule of Interpretation ; as the Roman Church the system which they believe to have been handed down in their Traditions ; and the Philosophical, which makes our pre-conceived opinions, the rule of faith ; which includes the consideration of the proper office of reason in the interpretation of scripture. The history and claims of these several systems, and their respective influence on the church, open to us as instructive a field of investigation, as any which ecclesiastical history affords.

We may conclude the general outline of this department, by stating the most important and interesting of the duties it enjoins, viz. the immediate study of the Word of God. With this we are to be occupied from the commencement, to the close of our course. The object of Biblical Literature, is to enable us to do this with the

best advantage. Not contented with prescribing rules of Interpretation, and furnishing the various means for the illustration of the Bible, it is a great part of her duty to oversee our actual application of them. It is therefore to the delightful employment of studying the Scriptures that she invites us.

I have not forgotten, that the professed object of this Dissertation, is to exhibit the importance of Biblical Literature. But I feel that I have already nearly completed the task assigned me, by shewing, as far as my knowledge of the subject would permit, what Biblical Literature is; because I conceive the feeblest statement of its nature, is demonstrative of its Importance. The importance of a course of study, whose object is to fix with certainty the Sacred Text, and exhibit the evidence that the Bible we now have, is the Bible which God delivered to his church; to assist us in discovering and exhibiting its meaning, by prescribing the principles by which it is to be explained, and bringing within our reach the various means of illustration; and, above all, which leads us so much to the immediate study of the Word itself:—the importance of such a course, is surely a subject on which diversity of opinion is impossible. It is my

intention, therefore, in the remainder of this discourse, merely to make some remarks, intended to impress on our minds, the necessity of paying particular attention to this subject, the importance of which we must all admit.

I. The first consideration I would mention is, *the difficulty of the subject.*

This difficulty, as it regards the criticism of the Bible, results from the extent of the subject, and from its lying, in a good degree, without the common course of our studies. Were it required of every individual to satisfy himself, of the integrity of the Text, by a personal inspection of the various sources of proof, by collating numerous manuscripts, examining versions, &c. the task would be impossible. It is happily unnecessary: the evidence on this subject has been collected by others. But we are required to examine this evidence; and see upon what ground this pillar of our faith, the Integrity of the Text, is founded. To satisfy ourselves on this subject, will require considerable attention. The necessity of this knowledge is evident from the fact, that we can scarcely be engaged in conversation, on disputed theological points of the day, even with men not professionally interested in the subject, without

their objecting, that some of the passages we may advance are spurious; expressing great surprise that we should think of advancing them: that all parties admit that they are interpolations, &c. Such remarks are often made, when there is little or no foundation for them; but unless we know the truth of the case, we must not only submit to the pain of exposed ignorance; but of seeing our cause injured, in the view of all who may be present. We must know, therefore, what passages really are disputed, and upon what grounds.

This difficulty, however, is slight, compared with that of *explaining* the Sacred Volume. The Scriptures are hard to be understood. This assertion is perfectly consistent with the cardinal doctrine of the perspicuity of Scripture. As to their general import, they are perspicuous: it is easy to learn from them the path of duty and the way of life; but so to understand them as to enter fully into their meaning, and to be able "rightly to divide" them, is exceedingly difficult. This difficulty arises from many different sources; as from the antiquity of the Books; their being written in languages which have been dead for ages; being composed by individuals, and addressed to persons whose

situation, habits, laws, &c. were so different from our own ; containing frequent allusions to opinions and circumstances familiar to the writers and their immediate readers, of which we are ignorant. Besides, the nature of the subjects, and the manner in which they are treated, give peculiar difficulty to the interpretation of the Bible. In proof that such difficulty really does exist, it is unnecessary to refer to the diversity of opinion as to the meaning of scripture, or to the universal demand for commentaries. It is sufficient to satisfy ourselves, both as to this point, and as to the necessity of study, to ask ourselves how much we understand of the Prophets or Epistles, by a mere common or cursory reading? Whether they do not appear dark, and confused ; and whether, if we have at any time laboriously studied any particular Book or chapter, the darkness has not in a great measure vanished, the confusion been reduced to order, and the whole opened to an extent, and risen in a richness, of which we had previously no conception. While, therefore, the perspicuity of the Sacred Scriptures, as to all that is essential, and their unspeakable importance, are reasons for their universal distribution ; the difficulty of understanding them, to the extent to

which we may, and are bound to understand them, is a reason why we should be diligent in our investigations of their meaning, and seize with avidity every possible assistance.

II. A second consideration which should secure your attention to this subject is, *the great and prevalent ignorance of the Bible.*

One of the principal ways by which this ignorance is betrayed, is the misapplication of scripture, quoting it in a different sense, or applying it to a different purpose, from that intended by the sacred writer. When speaking or writing on any subject, texts often crowd upon the mind, and if the words be applicable to our purpose, the passage is applied, without adverting to the intention of the writer, or the mind of the Spirit. Examples of this kind, and of passages being made to speak far more than they really contain, and even something very different from it, are occurring every day, and are to be found even in the writings of eminent men.

Another proof of this point, is quoting as authoritative every thing found in the Bible without considering its origin. How often do we hear passages from the speeches of Job's friends, advanced in proof of some particular doctrine? The doctrine may be true, and the words may

contain it ; but it is most certainly improper, to quote and urge as of divine authority, the very speeches, in which these men were endeavouring to establish error, for which God reprov'd them, and which assuredly were not inspired. Ignorance of the Bible or want of judgment, is also frequently evinced by adducing weak or unsound arguments from scripture language, in support of important doctrines. Perhaps there is no mistake which the friends of religion ever make, which has been productive of so much evil as this. The mind becomes very unjustly suspicious of the whole, on discovering the weakness or fallacy of any part of a proof.

Without dwelling on this subject, it is sufficient to satisfy our minds of the extent of this evil, as it regards ourselves, by asking how far we really understand the Bible ? Do we understand the Law of Moses ; the system of government and religion it prescribed ; the connection between the two ; its ceremonial institutions and their typical character ? Could we undertake to explain the book of Job, or the writings of Solomon ? Which of the Prophets is it, with the origin, design, and fulfilment of whose predictions, we feel ourselves sufficiently acquainted ? If we turn to the New Testament,

will the case be in any great degree altered? Apart from those truths which blaze on every page, which every man knows, and by which we live, should we like to be called upon to explain any one solitary book, unfolding its design, tracing the relation of its parts, entering into the spirit of the author, understanding his peculiarities, and removing his difficulties? Let it not be supposed we mean to intimate such complete understanding of the whole Bible, to be within our reach; it is more than any man ever has accomplished, and is doubtless far beyond the compass of our powers. All that is intended, is to shew that our ignorance of the Bible is much greater than we might at first imagine; and that a consciousness of it should rouse us to endeavour to gain all the knowledge of the Sacred Volume which well directed study, with the divine blessing, may secure.

It may be proper here to remark that this ignorance of the Bible, results as much from our studying it improperly, as from not studying it sufficiently. We study the Bible too much in detached passages, as we find it quoted in different authors, or as it becomes necessary for the duties of the pulpit:—whereas we should study the entire Books, as continued discourses.

We should learn the particular occasion of each ; the immediate purpose it was intended to answer ; and endeavour to enter into the spirit and design of the writer, following the course of his argument, marking the manner in which his exhortations arise out of his doctrines, and duty springs from truth. It is admitted that we here enter on a field which is boundless ; but it is all important that we learn how to study the Scriptures. If we adopt wrong principles of interpretation ; as for example, the doctrine of *Cocceius*, that the Bible means all it can be made to mean, and thus find, with him, the doctrine of justification in the battle of the five kings ; or, with *Lampe*, the history of the Reformation in the feeding of the five thousand, we may devote much study to the Bible without becoming the wiser. All that is expected of us here, is that we gain correct, and if possible enlarged views ; that we adopt right principles, and learn how to apply them ; and then go on to the end of life, when we shall find our feet are just entering on this ever widening field of truth and glory.

III. The third consideration is, *that this course of study would result in our increased knowledge of the doctrines of the Bible, and conviction of their truth.*

It is confessedly important that the leading doctrines of our religion should be thoroughly discussed; that their truth should be established by arguments drawn from Scripture, from providence, from the state and character of man; and that the relations of these truths should be exhibited. Valuable as such writings unquestionably are, no one will maintain they should be studied, to the exclusion of the Bible; or that the doctrines of scripture can be better learned elsewhere, than from the scriptures themselves. For doctrinal knowledge, therefore, we should come to the Bible, and study its several parts as continued discourses. We should here find the truth delivered, without the imperfections which must attend all human productions. We should see religion in her heavenly attire. The greater certainty, as to the truth of the doctrines of our religion, which would result from this mode of study, is another of its advantages. In all doctrinal discussions, the testimony of scripture must be imperfectly adduced. From the nature of the case, it is only detached passages, or single assertions of the truth, that can be advanced. But when we turn to the scriptures themselves, and study the Books in connection, we find that these doctrines are not merely taught in single

sentences, but by the whole discourse; that it is evidently the great object of the sacred writer, to exhibit and confirm them; that for this purpose he adduces arguments from different sources, presents his subject in different aspects, anticipates and answers objections, draws inferences and infers duties, which presuppose the doctrines. This is a testimony which cannot be quoted; yet it is one of the strongest kind. We feel that our faith does not rest on the interpretation of particular texts; that its foundation is broad as the Bible, and sure as God's testimony.

IV. The last general consideration I shall mention, as calculated to secure our attention to this subject is drawn from *the present state and future prospects of our country.*

The history of christendom clearly evinces, that no class of men have greater influence in society than the clergy. From the nature of our government, this influence is not secured, by establishment, to any one order, but will be possessed by those, whose mental and moral character enable them to obtain it. In no country, therefore, is the necessity of personal exertion, in order to secure the means of being useful, so great as in our own. This influence can only be

secured by knowledge. The sphere on which a minister operates, depends on his intellectual attainments; the nature of his influence, on his doctrines and religious character. As a general rule, ministers operate on their own level, and below it, much more than they do above it. An ignorant man must be content to do good among the ignorant. An educated man may influence those of the same degree of learning with himself, as well as his inferiors. If we wish, therefore, that society in some of its most important departments should be kept within the saving influence of the truth, and not resigned to the influence of cheerless infidelity, or the power of those who are fatally erroneous, we must keep pace with the country in its advances in knowledge. This is not only an argument for learning in the general, but also for attention to this particular department, because it embraces in its range many of the subjects which men of the world value, and the knowledge of which they respect. That a minister is a sound divine, they consider a mere professional attainment; but if he be a classical scholar, and acquainted with the ancient history of society and philosophy, the general principles of literature, and other subjects with which this

department is more immediately connected, he is secure of their respect, and consequently better prepared to do them good.

And, again ; Biblical Literature is rapidly gaining ground in our country. In our elder sister Institution, it has been pressed forward by the talents and zeal of one of its Professors with an enthusiasm of which none of us are ignorant. Will not our neglect of this subject put us under very serious disadvantages ? Is it not time that we should awake to a livelier sense of its importance ?

Finally ; the state of religious opinion in our country, imperiously calls for our attention to this subject. The advocates of a system which we all consider as fatally erroneous, are exerting an influence for its advancement, which it well becomes us to consider how we may counteract. Their plans are well laid and extensive : some of the most important fountains of literature are already in their hands. Wherever we turn our eyes, we see clear indications that a serious struggle is at hand. Happily this struggle is to be made on Bible ground. The authority of the Bible has not been disclaimed. We are called upon, therefore, in preparing for this great conflict, which is probably to be the most momen-

tous, that truth and piety have ever yet endured, in the first place, to establish the integrity of the Sacred Text ; and then the rules by which it is to be explained. If our adversaries would abide the application of these rules, we should have little apprehension as to the result. And this they must abide, or retreat into a still darker shade of error. This battle is not to be with an individual, nor in a day, but constantly and every where. Our opponents are wise and learned ; and they have devoted themselves particularly to this subject. If we expect, therefore, to acquit ourselves to God and his church ; if we intend to discharge the solemn obligation of handing down to the generations which follow, the truth, pure as we received it from our Fathers, we must prepare to meet them upon equal terms. Shall error, and in its train destruction, triumph over truth and salvation, through the ignorance of truth's defenders ?

In whatever aspect we view this subject, if we turn to its extent and ever varying interest ; to our lamentable ignorance of the Bible ; to the enlargement and certainty which it promises to our doctrinal knowledge ; or if we listen to the cry of the church gathering for her conflict, an

hundred voices call us to arise, and the solitary whisper which would question its importance, dies unperceived.

Before concluding this discourse, it may be proper briefly to notice two objections which may be raised to this course of study.

I. The first is, *the result of these pursuits in the German Universities.*

It is unquestionably a fact, that the country which has been most distinguished for its progress in Biblical Literature, has also been most remarkable, for the prevalence of false doctrines, and the most irreverent treatment of the Sacred Scriptures. But, it by no means follows, that these evils are the natural result of this particular course of study. Were we better acquainted with the history of opinion in *Germany*, and the nature of its institutions, we might be able to give a satisfactory account of this phenomenon. Since, however, we know what Biblical Literature is, and can see, that there is nothing in its nature which leads to this licentiousness of error, the mere fact that it has been cultivated in a country, in which error abounds, should not make us suspicious of its propriety. This fact may have arisen from a multitude of causes. It may, in a measure, have arisen from

the circumstance that in the numerous Universities of that country, there are chairs allotted to the various departments of Theology; that the only requisites for these chairs, are talents and learning. But what would be the natural consequences of such men having it as their official duty through life to teach Theology? Need we wonder that they would prefer to direct their attention in a considerable degree to the externals of the Bible; to the philosophy of its language; to the history of its text, its manuscripts, and versions; to the illustration of its facts, and statements, by a reference to the history, manners, and opinions of the East? and it is to be expected that they would devote lives of laborious study, to these subjects, without collecting much that is valuable in illustration of the Sacred Scriptures; without opening a large field of inviting study, and furnishing materials, which the friends of religion may employ for the illustration and defence of the Word of God?

How far it is proper for us, to have recourse to the works of these men, is a difficult question. It is a point on which good men think very decidedly, though very differently. The danger apprehended, does not arise, from the force of the objections which may be brought against our

doctrines; but from the influence which such writings are calculated to produce upon the mind. Though it be admitted, that these works may contain valuable matter, yet it is questioned, whether the young have sufficient skill, in all cases, to separate the poison from the food: whether it is possible to read able misrepresentations of the truth, without being in some measure affected by them: whether every young man, at the very commencement of his course, is a fit antagonist for the most learned and powerful of the enemies of the Gospel; and whether experience does not teach that the opinions of young men are in a good degree formed by the books they most frequently consult. It is thought, too, there is a great difference between coming to these books, as to the writings of the professed enemies of our religion, to learn, what they can advance against the doctrines we believe; and approaching them as friends, for the purposes of instruction. It is thought that the mind is imperceptibly put into a very different state; that our respect for the talents or erudition of the writer, prepares us too readily to acquiesce in his conclusions. But, if this danger be imaginary, is it possible to read without injury, works, in which the Bible and its doctrines are

most irreverently treated? to see the Sacred Volume placed on a level with the uninspired writings of profane antiquity?—the “*Mythology of the Jews*” and Greeks, discussed precisely in the manner; to hear the account of the creation, called the cosmogony of a weak and foolish people; the intercourse of *Moses* with God, explained as a mere device to obtain authority for his laws; the predictions of the Prophets, as the dictates of a heated imagination? And, especially, is it possible to hear uninjured, the adorable Redeemer, irreverently spoken of? to be told that in the performance of his most solemn miracles, “*ductus hilaritate,*” he pretended to perform them? Is it possible that blasphemy here, should not produce the same effect upon the mind, that *voluntary* intercourse with profane persons, has always been found to produce? By what influence is the effect prevented in the one case, which is acknowledged in the other? It is thought that all experience teaches that every work sends out an influence of the same character, with its pervading spirit; that those which are imbued with piety, tend to promote it; and that those which teem, either with immorality or profaneness, cannot be read with impunity. It is

hence inferred, that whatever philological knowledge may be buried in these writings, it is little worth the risk to moral health, which must be encountered to secure it.

This is a question on which we must all think for ourselves; it is a question on which the members of this society, will have not only to think, but to decide. This decision should be made, without regard to the opinions or practice of others, because it is peculiarly a personal concern, as a liberty on this subject, which might not be injurious to one, may prove destructive to another. If we find the perusal of these works, tends to diminish our reverence for the Word of God; to embolden us to treat it, as though it were not divine; and that we begin to read the blasphemies they contain, without shuddering; it is evident, however the case may be with others, that *we* should be greatly injured by studying them. Happily, we are not reduced to the necessity, of having recourse to these works: equally copious, and less exceptionable sources of information, are within our reach.

The preceding remarks, if correct in themselves, are applicable, however, only to one class of those eminent scholars, who have within the

last fifty years, appeared in *Germany*. There are many, of as great erudition as any others, whose works may be read, without the apprehension of being pained by the constant recurrence of irreverence and error; and some of the most valuable productions, even of those who have gone to the greatest lengths in false doctrines, are such as not to give rise to the expression of offensive opinions.

But how is it, that, with all their advantages, these learned men have come to such lamentable results in their expositions of scripture? Because they have proceeded on principles fundamentally erroneous: they have regarded the Bible as a mere human production, and treated it as such. Hence, they have felt at liberty to explain the accounts of the Old Testament, as the dreams of philosophers; and the miracles of the New, as mere natural occurrences. They, with many others, have adopted the *Philosophical* mode of Interpretation, making their pre-conceived opinions, the rule of their expositions, which of course must vary, as their philosophical principles vary. The man whose philosophy denies the possibility of a miracle, can find no such wonder on the sacred page. The disbeliever in the immateriality of the soul, and

in a separate spiritual existence, can see no proof of the existence of Angels, good or evil, nor of an intermediate state, in the Word of God. The doctrines of the Trinity, Incarnation, and Atonement, fade from the Bibles of those, to whom they are unphilosophical. But this abuse of reason and learning, does not prove, that neither are to be used in the exposition of Scripture; nor does the fact, that many, who have possessed great external advantages, for understanding the sacred writings, have shamefully abused them, prove that these advantages are dangerous or worthless. It does indeed prove, that something more is requisite, to make a good Interpreter of Scripture, than mere human learning. And this is most cheerfully acknowledged. The man whose heart is most like those of the sacred writers, and who enjoys most of the influences of the same all-teaching Spirit which wrought in them, will best understand the records they have left. This of all qualifications is beyond comparison the best; yet no one will deny, that human learning, is useful in interpreting the Scriptures.

II. But, *is not this course of study unfriendly to piety?* This depends on the manner in which it is conducted. All familiar intercourse with

holy things is dangerous. The ministry itself, from its official attention to religious duties and religious truth, is perilous. And as this department, is more immediately conversant with the Bible, it may be more peculiarly exposed. But, is there any thing in the very nature of a course of study, whose object, is to fix with certainty the sacred text; to state the principles which reason and piety approve, on which it is to be interpreted; and which leads us so much, to the study of the Sacred Volume; is there any thing in the nature of such a course inimical to piety? Surely not. If we could come to the Bible in some measure as we would enter God's presence, and read its pages as we would hear his voice; the oftener we approach it the holier and happier we should be. But if we come to the Scriptures, as to the works of men, without reverence, and without prayer, trusting in ourselves, our rules, or our learning, the result will be disastrous. Whatever destroys our reverence for the Sacred Scriptures; or leads us to treat with careless familiarity the oracles of God, will lead not only to a decrease of piety, but to an amount of evil to the church, for which all human learning would be an empty compensation.

Fully persuaded however, that the course of study of which we have been speaking, is not only extensive, and delightful ; but in its nature, calculated to enlarge our views of divine truth, and to purify the heart ; it is with confidence, I commend this Society formed for improvement in Biblical Literature, and in the knowledge of the Bible, to the diligence of its members, and to the benediction of the Great Head of the Church.

