

Spurgeon Commenting on Commentaries

Commenting and Commentaries

by Charles H. Spurgeon

The present volume is the second of a series of works useful to Students and Ministers prepared by Mr. Spurgeon; and published at 2s. 6d. The first volume is "Lectures to my Students: a Selection from Addresses delivered to the Students of the Pastors' College, Metropolitan Tabernacle." Passmore and Alabaster, Paternoster Buildings.

Mr. Spurgeon has other works of a similar character in contemplation, which will be issued, if the Lord will. It is hoped that The College Series may render efficient service to preachers of the gospel. Friends who appreciate the books will greatly oblige by making them known to others. The same motive which prompted the author to write, leads him to desire a large circle of readers.

Preface

When I issued the first volume of "Lectures to my Students" it was my intention to prepare another series as soon as time permitted, and I meant to include two addresses upon Commenting in the proposed selection. It struck me, however, that a better thing was possible. The two lectures might introduce the topic of exposition, and then a catalogue of Commentaries might help the student to carry the advice into practice. The making of that catalogue would, of course, be no small labour; but, once accomplished, it might be of service to many, and effect more in the direction aimed at than the most earnest exhortations. I therefore resolved to attempt the work, and here is the result.

It would be easy to point out the deficiencies of the modern pulpit, and hold up one's own ideal of what preaching ought to be, but this has been so often attempted by others with such slender results that we decline the task. A judicious critic would probably complain that many sermons are deficient in solid instruction, Biblical exposition, and Scriptural argument: they are flashy, rather than fleshy; clever, rather than solid; entertaining, rather than impressive. He would point to rhetorical discourses in which doctrine is barely discernible, and brilliant harangues from which no food for the soul could ever be extracted. Having done this, he would probably propose that homilies should flow out of texts, and should consist of a clear explanation, and an earnest enforcement of the truths which the texts distinctly teach. Expository preaching he would advocate as the great need of the day, its best protection against rising errors, and its surest means of spiritual edification. To such observations most of us would offer no opposition; we should confess them to be full of wisdom, and worthy of being pondered. We should not unite in any indiscriminate censuring of hortatory addresses, or topical sermons, nor should we agree with the demand that every discourse should be limited to the range of its text, nor even that it should have a text at all; but we should heartily subscribe to the declaration, that more expository preaching is greatly needed, and that all preachers would be the better if they were more able expounders of the inspired Word.

To render such a result more probable, every inducement to search the Holy Scriptures should be placed in the way of our ministers, and to the younger brethren some guidance should be proffered as to the works most likely to aid them in their studies. Many are persuaded that they should expound the Word, but being unversed in the original tongues they can only fall back upon the help of their English Concordances, and are left floundering about, when a sound comment would direct their thoughts. True, the Holy Spirit will instruct the seeker, but he works by means. The Ethiopian eunuch might have received divine illumination, and doubtless did receive it, but still, when asked whether he understood the Scripture which he read, he replied, "How can I unless some man shall guide me?" The guiding man is needed still. Divines who have studied the Scriptures have left us great stores of holy thought which we do well to use. Their expositions can never be a substitute for our own meditations, but as water poured down a dry pump often sets it to work to bring up water of its own, so suggestive reading sets the mind in motion on its own account. Here, however, is the difficulty. Students do not find it easy to choose which works to buy, and their slender stores are often wasted on books of a comparatively worthless kind. If I can save a poor man from spending his money for that which is not bread, or, by directing a brother to a good book, may enable him to dig deeper into the mines of truth, I shall be well repaid. For this purpose I have toiled, and read much, and passed under review some three or four thousand volumes. From these I have compiled my catalogue, rejecting many, yet making a very varied selection. Though I have carefully used such judgment as I possess, I have doubtless made many errors; I shall certainly find very few who will agree with all my criticisms, and some persons may be angry at my remarks. I have, however, done my best, and, with as much impartiality as I can command, I have nothing extenuated nor set down aught in malice. He who finds fault will do well to execute the work in better style; only let him remember that he will have my heifer to plough with and therefore ought in all reason to excel me.

I have used a degree of pleasantry in my remarks on the Commentaries, for a catalogue is a dry affair, and, as much for my own sake as for that of my readers, I have indulged the mirthful vein here and there. For this I hope I shall escape censure, even if I do not win commendation.

The preface to the Catalogue will be found on pages 33 and 34, which the reader is requested to peruse before attempting to use the list.

To God I commend this labour, which has been undertaken and carried out with no motive but that of honoring his name, and edifying his Church by stimulating the study of his Word. May he, for his Son's sake, grant my heart's desire.

The Pastors' College

The preparation of the present work was suggested by the author's connection with the Pastors' College, and the Library of that Institution has in a high degree assisted in its execution, therefore the reader must permit the College to be noticed in these pages in the same manner as in the former volume of this series. To make it known, and to win for it willing friends is confessedly one object, of these publications, which may indeed be viewed as merely the giving forth to a wider area the instruction carried on within the College walls.

The Institution is intended to aid useful preachers in obtaining a better education. It takes no man to make him a minister, but requires that its pupils should, as a rule, have exercised their gifts for at least two years and have won souls to Jesus. These we receive, however poor or backward they may be, and our endeavours are all turned towards the one aim that they should be instructed in the things of God, furnished for their work, and practised in the gift of utterance. Much prayer is made by the Church that this end may be accomplished, nor has the prayer been in vain, for some 330 men are now declaring the gospel of Jesus who were trained in this manner. Besides the students for the regular ministry, several hundreds of street preachers, city missionaries, teachers, and workers of all kinds have passed through our evening classes, and a band of 250 such men are now with us, pursuing their callings by day and studying in the evening. We ask for much prayer from all our brethren, that the supply of the Spirit may sanctify the teaching, and anoint every worker for the service of the Lord.

As it would be quite unwarrantable for us to interfere with the arrangements of other bodies of Christians, who have their own methods of training their ministers, and as it is obvious that we could not find spheres for men in denominations with which we have no ecclesiastical connection, we confine our college to Baptists; and in order not to be harassed with endless controversies, we invite those only who hold those views of divine truth which are popularly known as Calvinistic,—not that we care for names and phrases, but as we wish to be understood, we use a term which conveys our meaning as nearly as any descriptive word can do. Believing the grand doctrines of grace to be the natural accompaniments of the fundamental evangelical truth of redemption by the blood of Jesus, we hold and teach them not only in our ministry to the masses, but in the more select instruction of the class room. Latitudinarianism with its infidelity, and sectarianism with its intolerance, are neither of them friends of ours: we delight in the man who believes, and therefore speaks. Our Lord has given us no permission to be liberal with what is none of ours. We are to give an account of every truth with which we are put in trust.

Our means for conducting this work are with the most High God, possessor of heaven and earth. We have no list of subscribers or roll of endowments. Our trust is in Him whom we desire to serve. He has supported the work for many years, by moving his stewards to send us help, and we are sure that he will continue to do so as long as he desires us to pursue this labour of love. We need, at least, 100 pounds every week of the year. Since our service is gratuitous in every sense, we the more freely appeal to those who agree with us in believing that to aid an earnest young minister to equip himself for his life work is a worthy effort. No money yields so large a return, no work is so important, just now none is so absolutely needful.

Nightingale Lane,
Clapham, Surrey.
C. H. Spurgeon

Lecture 1. A Chat about Commentaries

In order to be able to expound the Scriptures, and as an aid to your pulpit studies, you will need to be familiar with the commentators: a glorious army, let me tell you, whose acquaintance will be your delight and profit. Of course, you are not such wiseacres as to think or say that you can expound Scripture without assistance from the works of divines and learned men who have laboured before you in the field of exposition. If you are of that opinion, pray remain so, for you are not worth the trouble of conversion, and like a little coterie who think with you, would resent the attempt as an insult to your infallibility. It seems odd, that

certain men who talk so much of what the Holy Spirit reveals to themselves, should think so little of what he has revealed to others. My chat this afternoon is not for these great originals, but for you who are content to learn of holy men, taught of God, and mighty in the Scriptures. It has been the fashion of late years to speak against the use of commentaries. If there were any fear that the expositions of Matthew Henry, Gill, Scott, and others, would be exalted into Christian Targums, we would join the chorus of objectors, but the existence or approach of such a danger we do not suspect. The temptations of our times lie rather in empty pretensions to novelty of sentiment, than in a slavish following of accepted guides. A respectable acquaintance with the opinions of the giants of the past, might have saved many an erratic thinker from wild interpretations and outrageous inferences. Usually, we have found the despisers of commentaries to be men who have no sort of acquaintance with them; in their case, it is the opposite of familiarity which has bred contempt. It is true there are a number of expositions of the whole Bible which are hardly worth shelf room; they aim at too much and fail altogether; the authors have spread a little learning over a vast surface, and have badly attempted for the entire Scriptures what they might have accomplished for one book with tolerable success; but who will deny the preeminent value of such expositions as those of Calvin, Ness, Henry, Trapp, Poole, and Bengel, which are as deep as they are broad? and yet further, who can pretend to biblical learning who has not made himself familiar with the great writers who spent a life in explaining some one sacred book? Caryl on Job will not exhaust the patience of a student who loves every letter of the Word; even Collinges, with his nine hundred and nine pages upon one chapter of the Song, will not be too full for the preacher's use; nor will Manton's long metre edition of the hundred and nineteenth Psalm (Ps 119:1-176) be too profuse. No stranger could imagine the vast amount of real learning to be found in old commentaries like the following:—Durham on Solomon's Song, Wilcocks on Psalms and Proverbs, Jermin on Ecclesiastes and Proverbs, Greenhill on Ezekiel, Burroughs on Hosea, Ainsworth on the Pentateuch, King on Jonah, Hutcheson on John, Peter Martyr on Romans, &c., and in Willett, Sibbes, Bayne, Elton, Byfield, Daille, Adams, Taylor, Barlow, Goodwin, and others on the various epistles. Without attempting to give in detail the names of all, I intend in a familiar talk to mention the more notable, who wrote upon the whole Bible, or on either Testament, and I especially direct your attention to the titles, which in Puritan writers generally give in brief the run of the work.

First among the mighty for general usefulness we are bound to mention the man whose name is a household word, Matthew Henry.¹ He is most pious and pithy, sound and sensible, suggestive and sober, terse and trustworthy. You will find him to be glittering with metaphors, rich in analogies, overflowing with illustrations, superabundant in reflections. He delights in apposition and alliteration; he is usually plain, quaint, and full of pith; he sees right through a text directly; apparently he is not critical, but he quietly gives the result of an accurate critical knowledge of the original fully up to the best critics of his time. He is not versed in the manners and customs of the East, for the Holy Land was not so accessible as in our day; but he is deeply spiritual, heavenly, and profitable; finding good matter in every text, and from all deducing most practical and judicious lessons. His is a kind of commentary to be placed where I saw it, in the old meeting house at Chester—chained in the vestry for anybody and everybody to read. It is the poor man's commentary, the old Christian's companion, suitable to everybody, instructive to all. His own account of how he was led to write his exposition, affords us an example of delighting in the law of the Lord. "If any desire to know how so mean and obscure a person as I am, who in learning, judgment, felicity of expression, and all advantages for such a service, am less than the least of all my Master's servants, came to venture upon so great a work, I can give no other account of it but this. It has long been my practice, what little time I had to spare in my study from my constant preparations for the pulpit, to spend it in drawing up expositions upon some parts of the New Testament, not so much for my own use, as purely for my own entertainment, because I know not how to employ my thoughts and time more to my satisfaction. *Trahit sua quemque voluptas*; every man that studies hath some beloved study, which is his delight above any other; and this is mine. It is that learning which it was my happiness from a child to be trained up in by my ever honoured father, whose memory must always be very dear and precious to me. He often minded me, that a good textuary is a good divine; and that I should read other books with this in my eye, that I might be the better able to understand and apply the Scripture." You are aware, perhaps, that the latter part of the New Testament was completed by other hands, the good man having gone the way of all flesh. The writers were Messrs. Evans, Brown, Mayo, Bays, Rosewell, Harriss, Atkinson, Smith, Tong, Wright, Merrell, Hill, Reynolds, and Billingsley—all Dissenting ministers. They have executed their work exceedingly well, have worked in much of the matter which Henry had collected, and have done their best to follow his methods, but their combined production is far inferior to Matthew Henry himself, and any reader will soon detect the difference. Every minister ought to read Matthew Henry entirely and carefully through once at least. I should recommend you to get through it in the next twelve months after you leave college. Begin at the beginning, and resolve that you will traverse the goodly land from Dan to Beersheba. You will acquire a vast store of sermons if you read with your notebook close at hand; and as for thoughts, they will swarm around you like twittering swallows around an old gable towards the close of autumn. If you publicly expound the chapter you have just been reading, your people will wonder at the novelty of your remarks and the depth of your thoughts, and then you may tell them what a treasure Henry is. Mr. Jay's sermons bear indubitable evidence of his having studied Matthew Henry almost daily. Many of the quaint things in Jay's sermons are either directly traceable to Matthew Henry or to his familiarity with that writer. I have thought that the style of Jay was founded upon Matthew Henry: Matthew Henry is Jay writing, Jay is Matthew Henry preaching. What more could I say in commendation either of the preacher or the author?

It would not be possible for me too earnestly to press upon you the importance of reading the expositions of that prince among men,

John Calvin! ² I am afraid that scant purses may debar you from their purchase, but if it be possible procure them, and meanwhile, since they are in the College library, use them diligently. I have often felt inclined to cry out with Father Simon, a Roman Catholic, "Calvin possessed a sublime genius," and with Scaliger, "Oh! how well has Calvin reached the meaning of the prophets—no one better." You will find forty two or more goodly volumes worth their weight in gold. Of all commentators I believe John Calvin to be the most candid. In his expositions he is not always what moderns would call Calvinistic; that is to say, where Scripture maintains the doctrine of predestination and grace he flinches in no degree, but inasmuch as some Scriptures bear the impress of human free action and responsibility, he does not shun to expound their meaning in all fairness and integrity. He was no trimmer and pruner of texts. He gave their meaning as far as he knew it. His honest intention was to translate the Hebrew and the Greek originals as accurately as he possibly could, and then to give the meaning which would naturally be conveyed by such Greek and Hebrew words: he laboured, in fact, to declare, not his own mind upon the Spirit's words, but the mind of the Spirit as couched in those words. Dr. King very truly says of him, "No writer ever dealt more fairly and honestly by the Word of God. He is scrupulously careful to let it speak for itself, and to guard against every tendency of his own mind to put upon it a questionable meaning for the sake of establishing some doctrine which he feels to be important, or some theory which he is anxious to uphold. This is one of his prime excellences. He will not maintain any doctrine, however orthodox and essential, by a text of Scripture which to him appears of doubtful application, or of inadequate force. For instance, firmly as he believed the doctrine of the Trinity, he refuses to derive an argument in its favour from the plural form of the name of God in the first chapter of Genesis. It were easy to multiply examples of this kind, which, whether we agree in his conclusion or not, cannot fail to produce the conviction that he is at least an honest commentator, and will not make any passage of Scripture speak more or less than, according to his view, its divine Author intended it to speak."

The edition of John Calvin's works which was issued by the Calvin Translation Society, is greatly enriched by the remarks of the editors, consisting not merely of notes on the Latin of Calvin, and the French translation, or on the text of the original Scriptures, but also of weighty opinions of eminent critics, illustrative manners and customs, and observations of travellers. By the way, gentlemen, what a pity it is that people do not, as a rule, read the notes in the old Puritan books! If you purchase old copies of such writers as Brooks, you will find that the notes in the margin are almost as rich as the books themselves. They are dust of gold, of the same metal as the ingots in the centre of the page. But to return to Calvin. If you needed any confirmatory evidence as to the value of his writings, I might summon a cloud of witnesses, but it will suffice to quote one or two. Here is the opinion of one who is looked upon as his great enemy, namely, Arminius: "Next to the perusal of the Scriptures, which I earnestly inculcate, I exhort my pupils to peruse Calvin's commentaries, which I extol in loftier terms than Helmich ³ himself; for I affirm that he excels beyond comparison in the interpretation of Scripture, and that his commentaries ought to be more highly valued than all that is handed down to us by the Library of the Fathers; so that I acknowledge him to have possessed above most others, or rather above all other men, what may be called an eminent gift of prophecy."

Quaint Robert Robinson said of him, "There is no abridging this sententious commentator, and the more I read him, the more does he become a favourite expositor with me." Holy Baxter wrote, "I know no man since the apostles' days, whom I value and honour more than Calvin, and whose judgment in all things, one with another, I more esteem and come nearer to."

If you are well enough versed in Latin, you will find in Poole's Synopsis, ⁴ a marvellous collection of all the wisdom and folly of the critics. It is a large cyclopaedia worthy of the days when theologians could be cyclopean, and had not shrunk from folios to octavos. Query—a query for which I will not demand an answer—has one of you ever beaten the dust from the venerable copy of Poole which loads our library shelves? Yet as Poole spent no less than ten years in compiling it, it should be worthy of your frequent notice—ten years, let me add, spent in Amsterdam in exile for the truth's sake from his native land.

His work was based upon an earlier compilation entitled *Critici Sacri*, containing the concentrated light of a constellation of learned men who have never been excelled in any age or country.

Matthew Poole also wrote Annotations ⁵ upon the Word of God, in English, which are mentioned by Matthew Henry as having passed through many impressions in his day, and he not only highly praises them, but declares that he has in his own work all along been brief upon that which Mr. Poole has more largely discussed, and has industriously declined what is to be found there. The three volumes, tolerably cheap, and easily to be got at, are necessities for your libraries. On the whole, if I must have only one commentary, and had read Matthew Henry as I have, I do not know but what I should choose Poole. He is a very prudent and judicious commentator; and one of the few who could honestly say, "We have not willingly balked any obvious difficulty, and have designed a just satisfaction to all our readers; and if any knot remains yet untied, we have told our readers what hath been most probably said for their satisfaction in the untying of it." Poole is not so pithy and witty by far as Matthew Henry, but he is perhaps more accurate, less a commentator, and more an expositor. You meet with no ostentation of learning in Matthew Poole, and that for the simple reason that he was so profoundly learned as to be able to give results without a display of his intellectual crockery. A pedant who is for ever quoting Ambrose and Jerome, Piscator and Œcolampadius, in order to show what a copious reader he has been, is usually a dealer in small wares, and quotes only what others have quoted before him, but he who can give you the result

and outcome of very extensive reading without sounding a trumpet before him is the really learned man. Mind you do not confound the Annotations with the Synopsis; the English work is not a translation of the Latin one, but an entirely distinct performance. Strange to say, like the other great Matthew he did not live to complete his work beyond Isaiah 58; other hands united to finish the design.

Would it be possible to eulogise too much the incomparably sententious and suggestive folios of John Trapp?⁶ Since Mr. Dickinson has rendered them accessible,⁷ I trust most of you have bought them. Trapp will be most valuable to men of discernment, to thoughtful men, to men who only want a start in a line of thought, and are then able to run alone. Trapp excels in witty stories on the one hand, and learned allusions on the other. You will not thoroughly enjoy him unless you can turn to the original, and yet a mere dunce at classics will prize him. His writings remind me of himself: he was a pastor, hence his holy practical remarks; he was the head of a public school, and everywhere we see his profound scholarship; he was for some time amid the guns and drums of a parliamentary garrison, and he gossips and tells queer anecdotes like a man used to a soldier's life; yet withal, he comments as if he had been nothing else but a commentator all his days. Some of his remarks are far fetched, and like the far fetched rarities of Solomon's Tarshish, there is much gold and silver, but there are also apes and peacocks. His criticisms would some of them be the cause of amusement in these days of greater scholarship; but for all that, he who shall excel Trapp had need rise very early in the morning. Trapp is my especial companion and treasure; I can read him when I am too weary for anything else. Trapp is salt, pepper, mustard, vinegar, and all the other condiments. Put him on the table when you study, and when you have your dish ready, use him by way of spicing the whole thing. Yes, gentlemen, read Trapp certainly, and if you catch the infection of his consecrated humour, so much the better for your hearers.

A very distinguished place is due to Dr. Gill.⁸ Beyond all controversy, Gill was one of the most able Hebraists of his day, and in other matters no mean proficient. When an opponent in controversy had ventured to call him "a botcher in divinity," the good doctor, being compelled to become a fool in glorying, gave such a list of his attainments as must have covered his accuser with confusion. His great work on the Holy Scriptures is greatly prized at the present day by the best authorities, which is conclusive evidence of its value, since the set of the current of theological thought is quite contrary to that of Dr. Gill. No one in these days is likely to be censured for his Arminianism, but most modern divines affect to sneer at anything a little too highly Calvinistic: however, amid the decadence of his own rigid system, and the disrepute of even more moderate Calvinism, Gill's laurels as an expositor are still green. His ultraism is discarded, but his learning is respected: the world and the church take leave to question his dogmatism, but they both bow before his erudition. Probably no man since Gill's days has at all equalled him in the matter of Rabbinical learning. Say what you will about that lore, it has its value: of course, a man has to rake among perfect dunghills and dust heaps, but there are a few jewels which the world could not afford to miss. Gill was a master cinder sifter among the Targums, the Talmuds, the Mishna, and the Gemara. Richly did he deserve the degree of which he said, "I never bought it, nor thought it, nor sought it."

He was always at work; it is difficult to say when he slept, for he wrote 10,000 folio pages of theology. The portrait of him which belongs to this church, and hangs in my private vestry, and from which all the published portraits have been engraved, represents him after an interview with an Arminian gentleman, turning up his nose in a most expressive manner, as if he could not endure even the smell of freewill. In some such a vein he wrote his commentary. He hunts Arminianism throughout the whole of it. He is far from being so interesting and readable as Matthew Henry. He delivered his comments to his people from Sabbath to Sabbath, hence their peculiar mannerism. His frequent method of animadversion is, "This text does not mean this," nobody ever thought it did; "It does not mean that," only two or three heretics ever imagined it did; and again it does not mean a third thing, or a fourth, or a fifth, or a sixth absurdity; but at last he thinks it does mean so-and-so, and tells you so in a methodical, sermon like manner. This is an easy method, gentlemen, of filling up the time, if you are ever short of heads for a sermon. Show your people firstly, secondly, and thirdly, what the text does not mean, and then afterwards you can go back and show them what it does mean. It may be thought, however, that one such a teacher is enough, and that what was tolerated from a learned doctor would be scouted in a student fresh from college. For good, sound, massive, sober sense in commenting, who can excel Gill? Very seldom does he allow himself to be run away with by imagination, except now and then when he tries to open up a parable, and finds a meaning in every circumstance and minute detail; or when he falls upon a text which is not congenial with his creed, and hacks and hews terribly to bring the word of God into a more systematic shape. Gill is the Coryphaeus of hyper-Calvinism, but if his followers never went beyond their master, they would not go very far astray.

I have placed next to Gill in my library Adam Clarke,⁹ but as I have no desire to have my rest broken by wars among the authors, I have placed Doddridge between them. If the spirits of the two worthies could descend to the earth in the same mood in which they departed, no one house would be able to hold them. Adam Clarke is the great annotator of our Wesleyan friends; and they have no reason to be ashamed of him, for he takes rank among the chief of expositors. His mind was evidently fascinated by the singularities of learning, and hence his commentary is rather too much of an old curiosity shop, but it is filled with valuable rarities, such as none but a great man could have collected. Like Gill, he is one sided, only in the opposite direction to our friend the Baptist. The use of the two authors may help to preserve the balance of your judgments. If you consider Clarke wanting in unction, do not read him for savour but for criticism, and then you will not be disappointed.

The author thought that lengthy reflections were rather for the preacher than the commentator, and hence it was not a part of his plan to write such observations as those which endear Matthew Henry to the million. If you have a copy of Adam Clarke, and exercise discretion in reading it, you will derive immense advantage from it, for frequently by a sort of side light he brings out the meaning of the text in an astonishingly novel manner. I do not wonder that Adam Clarke still stands, notwithstanding his peculiarities, a prince among commentators. I do not find him so helpful as Gill, but still from his side of the question, with which I have personally no sympathy, he is an important writer, and deserves to be studied by every reader of the Scriptures. He very judiciously says of Dr. Gill, "He was a very learned and good man, but has often lost sight of his better judgment in spiritualising the text"; this is the very verdict which we pass upon himself, only altering the last sentence a word or two; "He has often lost sight of his better judgment in following learned singularities"; the monkey, instead of the serpent, tempting Eve, is a notable instance.

As I am paying no sort of attention to chronological order, I shall now wander back to old Master Mayer,¹⁰ a rare and valuable author. I have been in London a long time now, but I have only of late been able to complete my set. The first volume especially is rare in the extreme. The six volumes, folio, are a most judicious and able digest of former commentators, enriched with the author's own notes, forming altogether one of the fullest and best of learned English commentaries; not meant for popular use, but invaluable to the student. He is a link between the modern school, at the head of which I put Poole and Henry, and the older school who mostly wrote in Latin, and were tinctured with the conceits of those schoolmen who gathered like flies around the corpse of Aristotle. He appears to have written before Diodati and Trapp, but lacked opportunity to publish. I fear he will be forgotten, as there is but little prospect of the republication of so diffuse, and perhaps heavy, an author. He is a very Alp of learning, but cold and lacking in spirituality, hence his lack of popularity.

In 1653, Arthur Jackson,¹¹ Preacher of God's Word in Wood Street, London, issued four volumes upon the Old Testament, which appear to have been the result of his pulpit expositions to his people. Valuable his works would be if there were no better, but they are not comparable to others already and afterwards mentioned. You can do without him, but he is a reputable author. Far more useful is Ness's History And Mystery of the Old and New Testament,¹² a grand repository of quaint remarks upon the historical books of Scripture. You will find it contained in four thin folio volumes, and you will have a treasure if you procure it.

Need I commend Bishop Hall's Contemplations¹³ to you? Haak's Annotations¹⁴ come to us as the offspring of the famous Synod of Dort, and the Westminster Annotations¹⁵ as the production of a still more venerable assembly; but if, with my hat off, bowing profoundly to those august conclaves of master minds, I may venture to say so, I would observe that they furnish another instance that committees seldom equal the labours of individuals. The notes are too short and fragmentary to be of any great value. The volumes are a heavy investment.

Among entire commentators of modern date, a high place is usually awarded to Thomas Scott,¹⁶ and I shall not dispute his right to it. He is the expositor of evangelical Episcopalians, even as Adam Clarke is the prophet of the Wesleyans, but to me he has seldom given a thought, and I have almost discontinued consulting him. The very first money I ever received for pulpit services in London was invested in Thomas Scott, and I neither regretted the investment nor became exhilarated thereby. His work has always been popular, is very judicious, thoroughly sound and gracious: but for suggestiveness and pith is not comparable to Matthew Henry. I know I am talking heresy, but I cannot help saying that for a minister's use, Scott is mere milk and water—good and trustworthy, but not solid enough in matter for full grown men. In the family, Scott will hold his place, but in the study you want condensed thought, and this you must look for elsewhere.

To all young men of light purses let me recommend The Tract Society's Commentary,¹⁷ in six volumes, which contains the marrow of Henry and Scott, with notes from a hundred other authors. It is well executed, and for poor men a great Godsend. I believe the Society has some special arrangement for poor students, that they may have these volumes at the cheapest rate.

Gentlemen, if you want something full of marrow and fatness, cheering to your own hearts by way of comment, and likely to help you in giving to your hearers rich expositions, buy Dr. Hawker's Poor Man's Commentary.¹⁸ Dr. Hawker was the very least of commentators in the matter of criticism; he had no critical capacity, and no ability whatever as an interpreter of the letter; but he sees Jesus, and that is a sacred gift which is most precious whether the owner be a critic or no. It is to be confessed that he occasionally sees Jesus where Jesus is not legitimately to be seen. He allows his reason to be mastered by his affections, which, vice as it is, is not the worst fault in the world. There is always such a savour of the Lord Jesus Christ in Dr. Hawker that you cannot read him without profit. He has the peculiar idea that Christ is in every Psalm, and this often leads him totally astray, because he attributes expressions to the Saviour which really shock the holy mind to imagine our Lord's using. However, not as a substantial dish, but as a condiment, place the Plymouth vicar's work on the table. His writing is all sugar, and you will know how to use it, not devouring it in lumps, but using it to flavour other things.

"Albert Barnes," say you, "what, do you think of Albert Barnes?" Albert Barnes is a learned and able divine, but his productions are unequal in value, the gospels are of comparatively little worth, but his other comments are extremely useful for Sunday School

teachers and persons with a narrow range of reading, endowed with enough good sense to discriminate between good and evil. If a controversial eye had been turned upon Barnes's Notes years ago, and his inaccuracies shown up by some unsparing hand, he would never have had the popularity which at one time set rival publishers advertising him in every direction. His Old Testament volumes are to be greatly commended as learned and laborious, and the epistles are useful as a valuable collection of the various opinions of learned men. Placed by the side of the great masters, Barnes is a lesser light, but taking his work for what it is and professes to be, no minister can afford to be without it, and this is no small praise for works which were only intended for Sunday School teachers. [19](#)

Upon the New Testament Doddridge's Expositor [20](#) is worthy of a far more extensive reading than is nowadays accorded to it. It is all in the form of a paraphrase, with the text in italics; a mode of treatment far from satisfactory as a rule, but exceedingly well carried out in this instance. The notes are very good, and reveal the thorough scholar. Our authorised version is placed in the margin, and a new translation in the paraphrase. The four evangelists are thrown into a harmony, a plan which has its advantages but is not without its evils. The practical improvements at the end of each chapter generally consist of pressing exhortations and devout meditations, suggested by the matter under discussion. It is sadly indicative of the Socinianism of the age in which this good man lived, that he feels called upon to apologise for the evangelical strain in which he has written. He appears to have barely finished this work in shorthand at the time of his death, and the later books were transcribed under the care of Job Orton. No Life Insurance Society should accept the proposals of a commentator on the whole of either Testament, for it seems to be the rule that such students of the Word should be taken up to their reward before their task is quite completed.

Then, of course, gentlemen, you will economise rigidly until you have accumulated funds to purchase Kitto's Pictorial Bible. You mean to take that goodly freight on board before you launch upon the sea of married life. As you cannot visit the Holy Land, it is well for you that there is a work like the Pictorial Bible, in which the notes of the most observant travellers are arranged under the texts which they illustrate. For the geography, zoology, botany, and manners and customs of Palestine, this will be your counsellor and guide. Add to this noble comment, which is sold at a surprisingly low price, the eight volumes of Kitto's Daily Readings. [21](#) They are not exactly a commentary, but what marvellous expositions you have there! You have reading more interesting than any novel that was ever written, and as instructive as the heaviest theology. The matter is quite attractive and fascinating, and yet so weighty, that the man who shall study those eight volumes thoroughly, will not fail to read his Bible intelligently and with growing interest.

The Gnomon of the New Testament, By John Albert Bengel, [22](#) is the scholar's delight. He selected the title as modest and appropriate, intending it in the sense of a pointer or indicator, like the sundial; his aim being to point out or indicate the full force and meaning of the words and sentences of the New Testament. He endeavours to let the text itself cast its shadow on his page, believing with Luther that "the science of theology is nothing else but grammar exercised on the words of the Holy Spirit." The editor of the translation published by Messrs. Clarke, says in his preface, "It is quite superfluous to write in praise of the Gnomon of Bengel. Ever since the year in which it was first published, A.D. 1742, up to the present time, it has been growing in estimation, and has been more and more widely circulated among the scholars of all countries. Though modern criticism has furnished many valuable additions to our materials for New Testament exegesis, yet, in some respects, Bengel stands out still *facile princeps* among all who have laboured, or who as yet labour in that important field. He is unrivalled in felicitous brevity, combined with what seldom accompanies that excellence, namely, perspicuity. Terse, weighty, and suggestive, he often, as a modern writer observes, 'condenses more matter into a line, than can be extracted from pages of other writers.'" In the passages which form the subject of controversy between Calvinists and Arminians, Bengel takes the view adopted by the latter, and in this respect I do not concur with him. But whilst he thus gives an undue prominence, as it would seem to me, to the responsibility and freedom of man in these passages, yet, in the general tenor of his work, there breathe such a holy reverence for God's sovereignty, and such spiritual unction, that the most extreme Calvinist would, for the most part, be unable to discover to what section of opinions he attached himself, and as to the controverted passages would feel inclined to say, *Quum talis sis, utinam noster esses*.

Men with a dislike for thinking had better not purchase the five precious volumes, for they will be of little use to them; but men who love brain work will find fine exercise in spelling out the deep meaning of Bengel's excessively terse sentences. His principles of interpretation stated in his "Essay on the Right Way of Handling Divine Subjects," are such as will make the lover of God's word feel safe in his hands: "Put nothing into the Scriptures, but draw everything from them, and suffer nothing to remain hidden, that is really in them." "Though each inspired writer has his own manner and style, one and the same Spirit breathes through all, one grand idea pervades all." "Every divine communication carries (like the diamond) its own light with it, thus showing whence it comes; no touchstone is required to discriminate it." "The true commentator will fasten his primary attention on the letter (literal meaning), but never forget that the Spirit must equally accompany him; at the same time we must never devise a more spiritual meaning for Scripture passages than the Holy Spirit intended." "The historical matters of Scripture, both narrative and prophecy, constitute as it were the bones of its system, whereas the spiritual matters are as its muscles, blood vessels, and nerves. As the bones are necessary to the human system, so Scripture must have its historical matters. The expositor who nullifies the historical ground work of Scripture for the sake of finding only spiritual truths everywhere, brings death on all correct interpretations. Those expositions are the safest which keep closest to the text."

His idea of the true mode of dying touched me much when I first saw it. He declared that he would make no spiritual parade of his last hours, but if possible continue at his usual works, and depart this life as a person in the midst of business leaves the room to attend to a knock at the door. Accordingly he was occupied with the correction of his proof sheets as at other times, and the last messenger summoned him to his rest while his hands were full. This reveals a calm, well balanced mind, and unveils many of those singular characteristics which enabled him to become the laborious recensor of the various manuscripts, and the pioneer of true Biblical criticism.

The Critical English Testament. ²³ "A Critical New Testament, so compiled as to enable a reader, unacquainted with Greek, to ascertain the exact English force and meaning of the language of the New Testament, and to appreciate the latest results of modern criticism." Such is the professed aim of this commentary, and the compilers have very fairly carried out their intentions. The whole of Bengel's Gnomon is bodily transferred into the work, and as one hundred and twenty years have elapsed since the first issue of that book, it may be supposed that much has since been added to the wealth of Scripture exposition; the substance of this has been incorporated in brackets, so as to bring it down to the present advanced state of knowledge. We strongly advise the purchase of this book, as it is *multum in parvo*, and will well repay an attentive perusal. Tischendorf and Alford have contributed largely, with other German and English critics, to make this one of the most lucid and concise commentaries on the text and teachings of the New Testament.

Alford's Greek Testament, ²⁴ "for the use of Theological Students and Ministers," is an invaluable aid to the critical study of the text of the New Testament. You will find in it the ripened results of a matured scholarship, the harvesting of a judgment, generally highly impartial, always worthy of respect, which has gleaned from the most important fields of Biblical research, both modern and ancient, at home and abroad. You will not look here for any spirituality of thought or tenderness of feeling; you will find the learned Dean does not forget to do full justice to his own views, and is quite able to express himself vigorously against his opponents; but for what it professes to be, it is an exceedingly able and successful work. The later issues are by far the most desirable, as the author has considerably revised the work in the fourth edition.

What I have said of his Greek Testament applies equally to Alford's New Testament for English Readers, ²⁵ which is also a standard work.

I must confess also a very tender side towards Bloomfield's Greek Testament, ²⁶ and I am singular enough to prefer it in some respects to Alford; at least, I have got more out of it on some passages, and I think it does not deserve to be regarded as superseded.

The Commentary by Patrick, Lowth, Arnald, Whitby, and Lowman, ²⁷ is said by Darling to be of standard authority, but you may do without it with less loss than in the case of several others I have mentioned. The authors were men of great learning, their association in one commentary is remarkable, and their joint production has a place in all complete libraries.

Dr. Wordsworth's Holy Bible, With Notes and Introductions, ²⁸ is a valuable addition to our stores, but it is rendered much more bulky and expensive than it needed to be by the printing of the text at large. It gives many precious hints, and much of the choicest thought of mediaeval writers, besides suggesting catch words and showing connections between various passages. Although it is occasionally marred by the characteristic weaknesses of the Bishop, and has here and there foolishnesses at which one cannot but smile, it is a great work, such as only an eminent scholar could have produced.

I am not so enamoured of the German writers as certain of my brethren appear to be, for they are generally cold and hard, and unspiritual. As Dr. Graham says, "there are about twenty or thirty names in the literary world who have gained a conspicuous place in theological circles; and in German commentaries these are perpetually introduced. In some of them the bulk of the work is made up of these authoritative names, and quotations from their works. This gives their writings the appearance of prodigious learning and research. Every page is bristling with hard words and strange languages, and the eye of the common reader is terrified at the very appearance, as the peaceful citizen is at the pointed cannon of a fortress." I do, however, greatly prize the series lately produced under the presidency of Dr. Lange. ²⁹ These volumes are not all of equal value, but, as a whole, they are a grand addition to our stores. The American translators have added considerably to the German work, and in some cases these additions are more valuable than the original matter. For homiletical purposes these volumes are so many hills of gold, but, alas, there is dross also, for Baptismal Regeneration and other grave errors occur.

The Speaker's Commentary ³⁰ is issued (August, 1875) as far as the Lamentations. It is costly, too costly for your pockets, and I am therefore somewhat the less sorry to add that it is not what I hoped it would be. Of course it is a great work, and contains much which tends to illustrate the text; but if you had it you would not turn to it for spiritual food, or for fruitful suggestion, or if you did so, you would be disappointed. The object of the work is to help the general reader to know what the Scriptures really say and mean, and to remove some of the difficulties. It keeps to its design and in a measure accomplishes it.

I must also add to the list A Commentary, Critical, Experimental, and Practical, on the Old and New Testaments.³¹ Of this I have a very high opinion. It is the joint work of Dr. Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and Dr. David Brown. It is to some extent a compilation and condensation of other men's thoughts, but it is sufficiently original to claim a place in every minister's library: indeed it contains so great a variety of information that if a man had no other exposition he would find himself at no great loss if he possessed this and used it diligently.

Several other works I omit, not because they are worthless, or unknown to me, but because for scant purses the best will be best. I must not omit upon the New Testament the goodly volume of Burkitt.³² If you can get him cheap, buy him. He is the celebrated "Rector" whom Keach "rectified" in the matter of infant baptism. Burkitt is somewhat pithy, and for a modern rather rich and racy, but he is far from deep, and is frequently common place. I liked him well enough till I had read abler works and grown older. Some books grow upon us as we read and reread them, but Burkitt does not. Yet so far from depreciating the good man, I should be sorry to have missed his acquaintance, and would bespeak for him your attentive perusal.

The best commentators, after all, are those who have written upon only one book. Few men can comment eminently well upon the whole Bible, there are sure to be some weak points in colossal works; prolixity in so vast an undertaking is natural, and dulness follows at its heels—but a life devoted to one of the inspired volumes of our priceless Bible must surely yield a noble result. If I find myself able to do so, at some future time I will introduce you to a selection of the great one book writers. For the present this much must suffice.

^{1.} An Exposition of all the Books of the Old and New Testaments. By Matthew Henry, late minister of the gospel in Chester. (Many editions; to be met with at very low prices.)

^{2.} The Works of John Calvin, in 51 volumes. Messrs. Clark, of Edinburgh, announce that they possess the copyright of the works of Calvin originally published by the Calvin Translation Society, and issue them on the following terms:—Complete sets in 51 volumes, 9 pounds, 9 shillings. The "Letters," edited by Dr. Bonnet, 2 vols., 10 shillings. 6d., additional, Complete sets of Commentaries, 45 vols., 7 pounds 17s. 6d. The "Institutes," 3 vols., 24 shillings.

^{3.} Werner Helmich, a Dutch Protestant divine, A.D. 1551-1608.

^{4.} Synopsis Criticorum aliorumque S. Scripturae Interpretum. Opera Matthaei Poli. Londinensis, MDCLXIX.

^{5.} Annotations upon the Holy Bible. Wherein the sacred text is inserted, and various readings annexed, together with the parallel Scriptures. The more difficult terms in each verse explained; seeming contradictions reconciled; questions and doubts resolved; and the whole text opened. By the late Rev. and learned divine, Mr. Matthew Poole. 1700.

^{6.} Annotations upon the Old and New Testament, in five distinct volumes. Whereof the first is upon the five Books of Moses, and upon the following books, of Joshua, Judges, Ruth, Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles. The second is upon Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Job, and Psalms. The third is upon Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Solomon's Song, and the four major prophets, with a treatise called, "The righteous Man's Recompense." The fourth is upon the twelve minor prophets, the fifth and last is upon the whole New Testament, with a Decade of Divine Discourses, or Common-places, thereunto annexed. By John Trapp, M.A., pastor and preacher of the word of God at Weston-upon-Avon, in Gloucestershire. 1662.

^{7.} The reprint by Mr. R. D. Dickinson is edited by Rev. W. Webster, and Rev. Hugh Martin, with a Memoir of the Author, by Rev. A. B. Grosart, 5 vols., super royal 8vo., cloth; 3 pounds 2s. 6d. to Subscribers.

^{8.} An Exposition of the Old Testament, in which are recorded the origin of mankind, of the several nations of the world, and of the Jewish nation in particular; the lives of the patriarchs of Israel; the journey of that people from Egypt to the land of Canaan, and their settlement in that land: their laws, moral, ceremonial, and judicial; their government and state under judges and kings; their several captivities, and, their sacred books of devotion: in the exposition of which, it is attempted to give an account of their several books and the writers of them; a summary of each chapter, and the genuine sense of each verse, and, throughout the whole, the original text and the versions of it, are inspected and compared; interpretation of the best note, both Jewish and Christian, consulted; difficult places at large explained, seeming contradictions reconciled, and various passages illustrated and confirmed by testimonies of writers as well Gentile as Jewish. By John Gill, D.D.

An Exposition of the New Testament, in which the sense of the sacred text is taken; doctrinal and practical truths are set in a plain and easy light, difficult passages explained; seeming contradictions reconciled; and whatever is material in the various readings and several Oriental versions is observed. The whole illustrated with notes taken from the most ancient Jewish writings. By John Gill, D.D.

^{9.} The Holy Bible, containing the Old and New Testaments. The text carefully printed from the most correct copies of the present

Authorised Translation, including the Marginal Readings and Parallel Texts. With a Commentary and Critical Notes; designed as a help to a better understanding of the Sacred Writings. By Adam Clarke, LL.D., F.S.A., &c. A new edition with the Author's final corrections. London: Printed for Thomas Tegg, &c. (7 volumes.)

[10.](#) A Commentary upon the whole "Old Testament," added to that of the same author upon the whole "New Testament," published many years before, to make a complete work upon the whole Bible. Wherein the divers Translations and Expositions, Literall and Mystically, of all the most famous Commentators, both Ancient and Modern, are propounded, examined, and judged of, for the more full satisfaction of the studious reader in all things, and many most genuine notions inserted for edification in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. A work, the like unto which hath never yet been published by any man, yet very necessary, not only for students in divinity, but also for every Christian that loveth the knowledge of divine things, or humane, whereof this comment is also full, &c. By John Mayer, Doctor of Divinity. London. MDCLIII.

[11.](#) A help for the understanding of the Holy Scripture. Intended chiefly for the assistance and information of those that use constantly every day to read some part of the Bible, and would gladly always understand what they read if they had some man to help them. The first part. Containing certain short notes of exposition upon the five books of Moses, &c. By Arthur Jackson, preacher of God's Word in Wood Street, London. Anno Dom. MDCDLIII.

[12.](#) A Complete History and Mystery of the Old and New Testament, logically discussed, and theologically improved. In three distinct volumes. The first beginning at the Creation of the World, and ending at Moses. The second continuing the History from Joshua till the Birth of Christ. The third from the Birth of Christ, to the Death of the last and longest living Apostle, John the Divine. The like undertaking (in such a manner and method) being never attempted before. By Mr. Christopher Ness, minister of the gospel in London. 1690. 3 vols., thin folio.

[13.](#) Contemplations on the historical passages of the Old and New Testament. By the right Rev. Joseph Hall, D.D., Bishop of Norwich. Numerous editions; the one before us has "a memoir of the author, by James Hamilton, M.B.S.," and was published by Mr. Nelson of Edinburgh. What wit! What sound sense! What concealed learning! His style is as pithy and witty as that of Thomas Fuller, and it has a sacred unction about it to which Fuller has no pretension.

[14.](#) The Dutch Annotations upon the whole Bible; or, all the Holy Canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, together with, and according to, their own, translation of all the text: as both the one and the other were ordered and appointed by the Synod of Dort, 1618, and published by authority, 1637. Now faithfully communicated to the use of Great Britain, in English, &c. By Theodore Haak, Esq. London, 1657. 2 volumes folio.

[15.](#) Annotations upon all the Books of the Old and New Testaments. This third, above the first and second, edition so enlarged, as they make an entire commentary on the sacred Scriptures, the like never before published in English. Wherein the text is explained, doubts resolved, Scriptures paralleled, and various readings observed. By the labour of certain learned divines, thereunto appointed, and therein employed, as is expressed in the preface. London, 1657.

[16.](#) The Holy Bible, containing the Old and New Testaments, according to the, authorised version, with explanatory notes, practical observations, and copious marginal references. By Thomas Scott, rector of Ashton Sandford, Bucks. A new edition, with the author's last corrections and improvements, with ten maps. London: L. B. Seeley and Son. 1827.

[17.](#) The Holy Bible; the text according to the authorised version; and a Commentary from Henry and Scott, with numerous Observations and Notes from other Authors; also, the Marginal References, Maps of the Countries mentioned in Scripture, and various useful Tables. London: The Religious Tract Society. (6 volumes.)

[18.](#) The Poor Man's Commentary on the Bible. By Robert Hawker, D.D., Vicar of Charles, Plymouth, 1822. (3 vols. folio, or 10 vols. 8vo.)

[19.](#) There are several English editions of Barnes's Notes; the one before us is thus advertised: "The Rev. Albert Barnes's Notes (Explanatory and Practical), designed for the Heads of Families, Students, Bible Classes, and Sunday Schools. Edited, and carefully revised, by the Rev. John Cumming, D.D., Minister of the Scotch Church, Crown Court." The Notes on the Entire New Testament, in 11 vols., on the Book of Isaiah, in 3 vols., on the Book of Job, in 2 vols., on the Book of Daniel, in 2 vols., or in 11 double vols. The "Notes on the Book of Psalms" are now being issued in 3 vols. by Messrs. Gall and Inglis.

[20.](#) The Family Expositor; or a Paraphrase and Version of the New Testament; with Critical Notes, and a Practical Improvement of each Section. By P. Doddridge, D.D. To which is prefixed a Life of the Author, By Andrew Kippis, D.D., F.R.S., and S.A. London: Longman, Orme, and Co., 1840. (4 vols. 8vo.)

[21.](#) Daily Bible Illustrations, being Original Readings for a Year, on subjects from Sacred History, Biography, Antiquities, and Theology. Especially designed for the family circle. By John Kitto, D.D., F.S.A. 8 volumes, small 8vo. (A New Annotated edition has

just been brought out by Messrs. Oliphant of Edinburgh.)

[22.](#) Gnomon of the New Testament, by John Albert Bengel. But first translated, into English, with original notes explanatory and illustrative. Revised and edited by Rev. Andrew R. Fausset, M.A., of Trinity College, Dublin. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clarke, 38, George-street, 1863. (Five vols. demy 8vo.; Subscription, 31s. 6d.)

[23.](#) The Critical English Testament.—Being an adaption of Bengel's Gnomon, with numerous Notes, showing Precise Results of Modern Criticism and Exegesis. Edited by Rev. W. L. Blackley, M.A., and Rev. James Hawes, M.A. Published by Messrs. Isbister and Co, Ludgate Hill, London. (Three vols. 18s.)

[24.](#) The Greek Testament: with a Critically Revised Text; a Digest of various Readings; Marginal References to Verbal and Idiomatic Usage; Prolegomena; and a Critical and Exegetical Commentary. For the use of Theological Students and Ministers. By Henry Alford, D.D., Dean of Canterbury. In four volumes. London: Rivingtons, Waterloo Place; and Deighton, Bell, and Co., Cambridge. 1861.

[25.](#) The New Testament for English Readers; containing the Authorized Version, with a revised English Text; Marginal References; and a Critical and Explanatory Commentary; By Henry Alford, D.D., late Dean of Canterbury. New edition. 4 vols. 8vo. 54/6. London, Oxford, and Cambridge. Rivingtons, and G. Bell and Sons, 1872.

[26.](#) The Greek Testament, with English Notes, Critical, Philological, and Explanatory; partly selected and arranged from the best Commentators, ancient and modern, but chiefly original. Fourth edition, revised. 2 vols. 8vo. London. 1841.

[27.](#) A Critical Commentary and Paraphrase on the Old and New Testament, and the Apocrypha. By Patrick, Lowth, Arnald, Whitby, and Lowman. A new edition, &c., in 4 vols. William Tegg and Co.

[28.](#) The Holy Bible; with Notes and Introductions [Old Testament only]. 6 vols. imp. 8vo. 6 pounds.—The New Testament in the original Greek; with Notes, Introductions, and Indexes. By Chr. Wordsworth, D.D., Bishop of Lincoln. 2 vols. imp. 8vo. 3 pounds. London, Oxford, and Cambridge. Rivingtons. 1872, etc.

[29.](#) A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures, Critical, Doctrinal, and Homiletical, with special reference to Ministers and Students, by John Peter Lange, D.D., in connection with a number of eminent European divines. Translated from the German, and edited, with additions, by Phillip Schaff, D.D., in connection with American scholars of various Evangelical denominations. Imperial 8vo. Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark. 1868, etc. [18 volumes, price 21s. each, or to subscribers 15s.]

[30.](#) The Holy Bible, according to the Authorized Version (A.D. 1611), with an Explanatory and Critical Commentary, and a Revision of the Translation by Bishops and other Clergy of the Anglican Church. Edited by F. C. Cook, M.A., Canon of Exeter, Preacher at Lincoln's Inn, and Chaplain in Ordinary to the Queen. Medium 8vo. London, John Murray. 1871, etc. [5 volumes published, Genesis to Lamentations. Vol. I in 2 parts, 30s. Vols. II and III, 36s. Vol. IV, 24s. Vol. V, 20s.]

[31.](#) A Commentary, Critical, Experimental, and Practical, on the Old and New Testaments. By the Rev. Robert Jamieson, D.D., St. Paul's, Glasgow; Rev. A. R. Fausset, A.M., St. Cuthbert's, York; and the Rev. David Brown, D.D., Professor of Theology, Aberdeen. 6 vols. medium 8vo. 3 pounds 12s.; or separately at 14s. each, vol. London, Glasgow, and Edinburgh. W. Collins, Sons, & Co. 1871.

[32.](#) Expository Notes, with Practical Observations, on the New Testament of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, wherein, &c. Endeavoured by William Burkitt, M.A. Late Vicar and Lecturer of Dedham, in Essex. (Numerous editions, folio and quarto.)

LECTURE 2

On Commenting

Having introduced you to the commentators, I must now press upon you one of the most practical uses of them, namely, your own public commenting upon the Scriptures read during divine service. Preaching in the olden time consisted very much more of exposition than it does now. I suppose that the sermons of the primitive Christians were for the most part expositions of lengthy passages of the Old Testament; and when copies of the gospels, and the epistles of Paul had become accessible to the churches, the chief work of the preacher would be to press home the apostolical teachings by delivering an address, the back bone of which would be a complete passage of Scripture: there would probably be but faint traces of divisions, heads and points, such as we employ in modern discoursing, but the teacher would follow the run of the passage which was open before him, commenting as he read. I suppose this to have been the case, because some of the early Christian modes of worship were founded very much upon that of the synagogue. I say some of the modes, since I suppose that as the Lord Jesus left his disciples free from rubrics and liturgies, each church worshipped according to the working of the free Spirit among them; one with the open meeting of the Corinthians, and another with a presiding minister, and a third with a mixture of the two methods. In the synagogue, it was the rule of

the Rabbis that never less than twenty two verses of the law should be read at one time, and the preaching consisted of notes upon a passage of that length. Such a rule would be a mere superstition if we were slavishly bound by it, but I could almost wish that the custom were reestablished, for the present plan of preaching from short texts, together with the great neglect of commenting publicly upon the word is very unsatisfactory. We cannot expect to deliver much of the teaching of Holy Scripture by picking out verse by verse, and holding these up at random. The process resembles that of showing a house by exhibiting separate bricks. It would be an astounding absurdity if our friends used our private letters in this fashion, and interpreted them by short sentences disconnected and taken away from the context. Such expositors would make us out to say in every letter all we ever thought of, and a great many things besides far enough from our minds; while the real intent of our epistles would probably escape attention. Nowadays since expository preaching is not so common as it ought to be, there is the more necessity for our commenting during the time of our reading the Scriptures. Since topical preaching, hortatory preaching, experimental preaching, and so on—all exceedingly useful in their way—have almost pushed proper expository preaching out of place, there is the more need that we should, when we read passages of Holy Writ, habitually give running comments upon them.

I support my opinion with this reason, that the public reading of the abstruser parts of Scripture is of exceedingly little use to the majority of the people listening. I can recollect hearing in my younger days long passages out of Daniel, which might have been exceedingly instructive to me if I had obtained the remotest conception of what they meant. Take again, parts of the prophecy of Ezekiel, and ask yourselves what profit can arise from their perusal by the illiterate, “unless some man shall guide them”? What more edification can come from a chapter in English which is not understood than from the same passage in Hebrew or Greek? The same argument which enforces translation demands exposition. If but a few explanatory words are thrown in by a judicious reader, it is wonderful how luminous obscure portions may be made. Two or three sentences will often reveal the drift of a whole chapter; the key of a great difficulty may be presented to the hearer in half a score words, and thus the public reading may be made abundantly profitable. I once saw a school of blind children among the charming ruins of York Abbey, and could not help pitying their incapacity to enjoy so much beauty: how willingly would I have opened their eyes! Are ignorant people wandering among the glories of Scripture much less to be pitied? Who will refuse them the light?

Abundant evidence has come before me that brief comments upon Scripture in our ordinary services are most acceptable and instructive to our people. I have often heard from working men, and their wives, and from merchants and their families, that my own expositions have been most helpful to them. They testify that when they read the Bible at home in the family, the exposition makes it doubly precious to them; and the chapter which they had unprofitably read in course at family prayers, when they pursue it the next time, recollecting what their minister has said upon it, becomes a real delight to them. The mass of our hearers, in London at least, do not, to any appreciable extent, read commentaries or any other books which throw a light upon the Scriptures. They have neither the money nor the time to do so, and if they are to be instructed in the Word of God in things which they cannot find out by mere experience, and are not likely to have explained to them by their associates, they must get that instruction from us, or nowhere else; nor do I see how we are to give them such spiritual assistance except through the regular practice of exposition.

Besides, if you are in the habit of commenting, it will give you an opportunity of saying many things which are not of sufficient importance to become the theme of a whole sermon, and therefore would probably remain unnoticed, to the great loss of the Lord's people and others. It is astounding what a range of truth, doctrinal, practical, and experimental, Holy Scripture brings before us; and equally worthy of admiration is the forcible manner in which that truth is advanced. Hints given in the way in which the word of God offers them are always wise and opportune; as, for instance, the rebukes which the word administers might have seemed too severe had they been made by the pastor, unsustained by the word and unsuggested by it, but arising out of the chapter they cannot be resented. You can both censure sins and encourage virtues by dilating upon the histories which you read in the inspired records, whereas you might never have touched upon them had not the chapter read brought the matter before you. If you want to make full proof of your ministry, and to leave no single point of revelation untouched, your easiest mode will be to comment upon Scripture habitually. Without this, much of the word will be utterly unknown to many of your people. It is a very sad fact that they do not read so much as they should at home; the ungodly, in England, scarcely read the Bible at all; and if only that part which we preach upon be expounded to them, how little of the Bible can they ever know! If you will mark your Bibles with lines under the texts from which you have spoken, as I have always done with an old copy which I keep in my study, you will discover that in twelve or fourteen years very little of the book has been gone through; a very large proportion of it remains unmarked, like a field unploughed. Try, then, by exposition to give your people a fair view of the entire compass of revelation; take them as it were to the top of Nebo, and show them the whole land from Dan to Beersheba, and prove to them that everywhere it floweth with milk and honey.

Earnestly do I advocate commenting. It is unfashionable in England, though somewhat more usual beyond the Tweed. The practice was hardly followed up anywhere in England a few years ago, and it is very uncommon still. It may be pressed upon you for one other reason, namely, that in order to execute it well, the commenting minister will at first have to study twice as much as the mere preacher, because he will be called upon to prepare both his sermons and his expositions. As a rule, I spend much more time over the exposition than over the discourse. Once start a sermon with a great idea, and from that moment the discourse forms itself without much labour to the preacher, for truth naturally consolidates and crystallises itself around the main subject like sweet

crystals around a string hung up in syrup; but as for the exposition, you must keep to the text, you must face the difficult points, and must search into the mind of the Spirit rather than your own. You will soon reveal your ignorance as an expositor if you do not study; therefore diligent reading will be forced upon you. Anything which compels the preacher to search the grand old Book is of immense service to him. If any are jealous lest the labour should injure their constitutions, let them remember that mental work up to a certain point is most refreshing, and where the Bible is the theme toil is delight. It is only when mental labour passes beyond the bounds of common sense that the mind becomes enfeebled by it, and this is not usually reached except by injudicious persons, or men engaged on topics which are unrefreshing and disagreeable; but our subject is a recreative one, and to young men like ourselves the vigorous use of our faculties is a most healthy exercise. Classics and mathematics may exhaust us, but not the volume of our Father's grace, the charter of our joys, the treasure of our wealth.

A man to comment well should be able to read the Bible in the original. Every minister should aim at a tolerable proficiency both in the Hebrew and the Greek. These two languages will give him a library at a small expense, an inexhaustible thesaurus, a mine of spiritual wealth. Really, the effort of acquiring a language is not so prodigious that brethren of moderate abilities should so frequently shrink from the attempt. A minister ought to attain enough of these tongues to be at least able to make out a passage by the aid of a lexicon, so as to be sure that he is not misrepresenting the Spirit of God in his discourses, but is, as nearly as he can judge, giving forth what the Lord intended to reveal by the language employed. Such knowledge would prevent his founding doctrines upon expressions in our version when nothing at all analogous is to be found in the inspired original. This has been done by preachers time out of mind, and they have shouted over an inference drawn from a "shall" or an "if" gathered out of the translation, with as much assurance of infallibility and sense of importance as if the same language had occurred in the words which the Holy Ghost used. At such times, we have been reminded of the story told by the late beloved Henry Craik, in his book on the Hebrew language. At one time, the Latin Vulgate was so constantly spoken of as the very word of God, that a Roman Catholic theologian thus commented upon Gen. 1:10, "The gathering together of the waters called he seas." The Latin term for seas is *Maria*. On this ground, the writer asks, "What is the gathering together of waters but the accumulation of all the graces into one place, that is, into the Virgin Mary (*Maria*)? But there is this distinction, that *Maria* (the seas) has the (i) short, because that which the seas contain is only of a transitory nature, while the gifts and graces of the blessed Virgin (*Maria*) shall endure for ever." Such superlative nonsense may be indulged in if we forget that translations cannot be verbally inspired, and that to the original is the last appeal.

Fail not to be expert in the use of your Concordance. Every day I live I thank God more and more for that poor half crazy Alexander Cruden. Of course you have read his life, which is prefixed to the concordance; it exhibits him as a man of diseased mind, once or twice the inmate of a lunatic asylum, but yet for all that successfully devoting his energies to producing a work of absolutely priceless value, which never has been improved upon, and probably never will be; a volume which must ever yield the greatest possible assistance to a Christian minister, being as necessary to him as a plane to the carpenter, or a plough to the husbandman. Be sure you buy a genuine unabridged Cruden, and none of the modern substitutes; good as they may be at the price, they are a delusion and a snare to ministers, and should never be tolerated in the manse library. To consider cheapness in purchasing a concordance is folly. You need only one: have none but the best. At the head of each notable word, Cruden gives you its meaning, and very often all its particular shades of meaning, so that he even helps you in sermonising. When you have read his headings, by following out the concordance, you will observe connections in which the word occurs, which most advantageously and correctly fix its meaning. Thus will the word of God be its own key. A good textuary is a good theologian; be then well skilled in using Cruden.

I make but small account of most reference Bibles; they would be very useful if they were good for anything; but it is extremely easy to bring out a reference Bible which has verbal and apparent references, and nothing more. You will often turn to a reference, and will have to say, "Well, it is a reference, certainly, in a way, for it contains the same word, but there is no reference in the sense that the one text will explain the other." The useful reference cuts the diamond with a diamond, comparing spiritual things with spiritual; it is a thought reference, and not a word reference. If you meet with a really valuable reference Bible, it will be to you what I once heard a countryman call "a reverence Bible," for it will lead you to prize more and more the sacred volume. The best reference Bible is a thoroughly good concordance. Get the best, keep it always on the table, use it hourly, and you will have found your best companion.

Need I after my previous lectures commend to you the judicious reading of commentaries! These are called "dead men's brains" by certain knowing people, who claim to give us nothing in their sermons but what they pretend the Lord reveals direct to themselves. Yet these men are by no means original, and often their supposed inspiration is but borrowed wit. They get a peep at Gill on the sly. The remarks which they give forth as the Spirit's mind are very inferior in all respects to what they affect to despise, namely, the mind of good and learned men. A batch of poems was sent me some time ago for *The Sword and the Trowel*, which were written by a person claiming to be under the immediate influence of the Holy Spirit. He informed me that he was passive, and that what was enclosed was written under the direct physical and mental influence of the Spirit upon his mind and hand. My bookshelves can show many poems as much superior to these pretended inspirations as angels are to blue bottles; the miserable doggerel bore on its face the evidence of imposture. So when I listen to the senseless twaddle of certain wise gentlemen who are always boasting that they alone are ministers of the Spirit, I am ashamed of their pretensions and of them. No, my dear friends, you may take it, as a rule that

the Spirit of God does not usually do for us what we can do for ourselves, and that if religious knowledge is printed in a book, and we can read it, there is no necessity for the Holy Ghost to make a fresh revelation of it to us in order to screen our laziness. Read, then, the admirable commentaries which I have already introduced to you. Yet be sure you use your own minds too, or the expounding will lack interest. Here I call to mind two wells in the courtyard of the Doge's palace at Venice, upon which I looked with much interest. One is filled artificially by water brought in barges from a distance, and few care for its insipid contents; the other is a refreshing natural well, cool and delicious, and the people contend for every drop of it. Freshness, naturalness, life, will always attract, whereas mere borrowed learning is flat and insipid. Mr. Cecil says his plan was, when he laid a hold of a Scripture, to pray over it, and get his own thoughts on it, and then, after he had so done, to take up the ablest divines who wrote upon the subject, and see what their thoughts were. If you do not think and think much, you will become slaves and mere copyists. The exercise of your own mind is most healthful to you, and by perseverance, with divine help, you may expect to get at the meaning of every understandable passage. So to rely upon your own abilities as to be unwilling to learn from others is clearly folly; so to study others as not to judge for yourself is imbecility.

What should be the manner of your public commenting? One rule should be always to point out very carefully wherever a word bears a special sense; for rest assured in Holy Scripture the same word does not always mean the same thing. The Bible is a Book meant for human beings, and therefore it is written in human language; and in human language the same word may signify two or three things. For instance, "a pear fell from the tree"; "a man fell into drunken habits." There the meaning of the second word, "fell," is evidently different from the first, since it is not literal, but metaphorical. Again, "the cabman mounted the box"; "the child was pleased with his Christmas box"; "his lordship is staying at his shooting box." In each case there is the same word, but who does not see that there is a great difference of meaning? So it is in the word of God. You must explain the difference between a word used in a peculiar sense, and the ordinary meaning of the word, and thus you will prevent your people falling into mistakes. If people will say that the same word in Scripture always means the same thing, as I have heard some assert publicly, they will make nonsense of the word of God, and fall into error through their own irrational maxims. To set up canons of interpretation for the Book of God which would be absurd if applied to other writings is egregious folly: it has a show of accuracy, but inevitably leads to confusion.

The obvious literal meaning of a Scripture is not always the true one, and ignorant persons are apt enough to fall into the most singular misconceptions—a judicious remark from the pulpit will be of signal service. Many persons have accustomed themselves to misunderstand certain texts; they have heard wrong interpretations in their youth, and will never know better unless the correct meaning be indicated to them.

We must make sure in our public expositions that obscure and involved sentences are explained. To overleap difficulties, and only expound what is already clear, is to make commenting ridiculous. When we speak of obscure sentences, we mean such as are mostly to be found in the prophets, and are rendered dark through the translation, or the Orientalism of their structure, or through their intrinsic weight of meaning. Involved sentences most abound in the writings of Paul, whose luxuriant mind was not to be restrained to any one line of argument. He begins a sentence, and does not finish it perhaps until eight verses further on, and all the interstices between the commencement and the end of the sentence are packed full of compressed truth, which it is not always easy to separate from the general argument. Hints consisting of but two or three words will let your hearers know where the reasoning breaks off, and where it is taken up again. In many poetical parts of the Old Testament the speakers change; as in Solomon's Song, which is mostly a dialogue. Here perfect nonsense is often made by reading the passage as if it were all spoken by the same person. In Isaiah the strain often varies most suddenly, and while one verse is addressed to the Jews, the next may be spoken to the Messiah or to the Gentiles. Is it not always well to notify this to the congregation? If the chapters and verses had been divided with a little common sense, this might be of less importance, but as our version is so clumsily chopped into fragments, the preacher must insert the proper paragraphs and divisions as he reads aloud. In fine, your business is to make the word plain. In Lombardy I observed great heaps of huge stones in the fields, which had been gathered out from the soil by diligent hands to make room for the crops; your duty is to "gather out the stones," and leave the fruitful field of Scripture for your people to till. There are Orientalisms, metaphors, peculiar expressions, idioms, and other verbal memorabilia which arise from the Bible having been written in the East; all these you will do well to explain. To this end be diligent students of Oriental life. Let the geography of Palestine, its natural history, its fauna and its flora, be as familiar to you as those of your own native village. Then as you read you will interpret the word, and your flock will be fed thereby. ¹

The chief part of your commenting, however, should consist in applying the truth to the hearts of your hearers, for he who merely comprehends the meaning of the letter without understanding how it bears upon the hearts and consciences of men, is like a man who causes the bellows of an organ to be blown, and then fails to place his fingers on the keys; it is of little service to supply men with information unless we urge upon them the practical inferences therefrom. Look, my brethren, straight down into the secret chambers of the human soul, and let fall the divine teaching through the window, and thus light will be carried to the heart and conscience. Make remarks suitable to the occasion, and applicable to the cases of those present. Show how a truth which was first heard in the days of David is still forcible and pertinent in these modern times, and you will thus endear the Scriptures to the minds of your people, who prize your remarks much more than you imagine. Clean the grand old pictures of the divine masters; hang them

up in new frames; fix them on the walls of your people's memories, and their well instructed hearts shall bless you.

Is a caution needed amongst intelligent men? Yes, it must be given. Be sure to avoid prosiness. Avoid it everywhere, but especially in this. Do not be long in your notes. If you are supremely gifted do not be long; people do not appreciate too much of a good thing; and if your comments are only second rate, why, then be shorter still, for men soon weary of inferior talking. Very little time in the service can be afforded for reading the lessons; do not rob the prayer and the sermon for the sake of commenting. This robbing Peter to pay Paul is senseless. Do not repeat commonplace things which must have occurred even to a Sunday School child. Do not remind your hearers of what they could not possibly have forgotten. Give them something weighty if not new, so that an intelligent listener may feel when the service is over that he has learned at least a little.

Again, avoid all pedantry. As a general rule, it may be observed that those gentlemen who know the least Greek are the most sure to air their rags of learning in the pulpit; they miss no chance of saying, "The Greek is so and so." It makes a man an inch and a half taller by a foolometer, if he everlastingly lets fall bits of Greek and Hebrew, and even tells the people the tense of the verb and the case of the noun, as I have known some do. Those who have no learning usually make a point of displaying the pegs on which learning ought to hang. Brethren, the whole process of interpretation is to be carried on in your study; you are not to show your congregation the process, but to give them the result; like a good cook who would never think of bringing up dishes, and pans, and rolling pin, and spice box into the dining hall, but without ostentation sends up the feast.

Never strain passages when you are expounding. Be thoroughly honest with the word: even if the Scriptures were the writing of mere men, conscience would demand fairness of you; but when it is the Lord's own word, be careful not to pervert it even in the smallest degree. Let it be said of you, as I have heard a venerable hearer of Mr. Simeon say of him, "Sir, he was very Calvinistic when the text was so, and people thought him an Arminian when the text was that way, for he always stuck to its plain sense." A very sound neighbour of ours once said, by way of depreciating the grand old reformer, "John Calvin was not half a Calvinist," and the remark was correct as to his expositions, for in them, as we have seen, he always gave his Lord's mind and not his own. In the church of St. Zeno, in Verona, I saw ancient frescoes which had been plastered over, and then covered with other designs; I fear many do this with Scripture, daubing the text with their own glosses, and laying on their own conceits. There are enough of these plasterers abroad, let us leave the evil trade to them and follow all honest calling. Remember Cowper's lines—

"A critic on the sacred text should be
Candid and learn'd, dispassionate and free;
Free from the wayward bias bigots feel,
From fancy's influence and intemperate zeal;
For of all arts sagacious dupes invent,
To cheat themselves and gain the world's assent,
The worst is—Scripture warped from its intent."

Use your judgment more than your fancy. Flowers are well enough, but hungry souls prefer bread. To allegorize with Origen may make men stare at you, but your work is to fill men's mouths with truth, not to open them with wonder.

Do not be carried away with new meanings. Plymouth Brethren delight to fish up some hitherto undiscovered tadpole of interpretation, and cry it round the town as a rare dainty; let us be content with more ordinary and more wholesome fishery. No one text is to be exalted above the plain analogy of faith; and no solitary expression is to shape our theology for us. Other men and wiser men have expounded before us, and anything undiscovered by them it were well to put to test and trial before we boast too loudly of the treasure trove.

Do not needlessly amend our authorized version. It is faulty in many places, but still it is a grand work taking it for all in all, and it is unwise to be making every old lady distrust the only Bible she can get at, or what is more likely, mistrust you for falling out with her cherished treasure. Correct where correction must be for truth's sake, but never for the vainglorious display of your critical ability. When reading short psalms, or connected passages of the other books, do not split up the author's utterances by interjecting your notes. Read the paragraph through, and then go over it again with your explanations; breaking it up as you may think fit at the second reading. No one would dream of dividing a stanza of a poet with an explanatory remark; it would be treason to common sense to do so: sound judgment will forbid your thus marring the word of God. Better far never to comment than to cut and carve the utterances of inspiration, and obscure their meaning by impertinently thrusting in untimely remarks of your own. Upon many passages comments would be gross folly: never think of painting the lily or gilding refined gold; leave the sublime sentences alone in their glory. I speak as unto wise men; prove your wisdom in this thing also.

If I were bound to deliver a sermon upon the subject in hand, I could not desire a better text than Ne 8:8: "So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading." Here is a hint for the reader as to his reading. Let it always be distinct. Aim to be good readers, and be the more anxious about it because few men are so, and all preachers ought to be so. It is as good as a sermon to hear our best men read the Scriptures; they bring out the meaning by their

correct emphasis and tone. Never fall into the idea that the mere utterance of the words before you is all that is required of you in reading; good reading is a high, but rare attainment. Even if you do not comment, yet read the chapter previously, and become familiar with it; it is inexcusable for a man to betray the fact that he is out of his latitude in the reading, traversing untrodden ground, floundering and picking his way across country, like a huntsman who has lost his bearings. Never open the Bible in the pulpit to read the chapter for the first time, but go to the familiar page after many rehearsals. You will be doubly useful if in addition to this you "gave the sense." You will then, by God's blessing, be the pastor of an intelligent, Bible loving people. You will hear in your meeting house that delightful rustle of Bible leaves which is so dear to the lover of the Word; your people will open their Bibles, looking for a feast. The Word will become increasingly precious to yourself, your knowledge will enlarge, and your aptness to teach will become every day more apparent. Try it, my brethren, for even if you should see cause to discontinue it, at least no harm will come of the attempt.

In all that I have said I have given you another reason for seeking the aid of the Holy Spirit. If you do not understand a book by a departed writer you are unable to ask him his meaning, but the Spirit, who inspired Holy Scripture, lives forever, and he delights to open up the Word to those who seek his instruction. He is always accessible: "He dwelleth with you and shall be in you." Go to him for yourselves and cry, "Open thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law"; and, this being granted you, entreat him to send forth his light and power with the Word when you expound it, that your hearers also may be led into all truth. Commentaries, expositions, interpretations, are all mere scaffolding; the Holy Ghost himself must edify you and help you to build up the church of the living God.

[1.](#) For suggestions as to interpretation the student is referred to the Bible Handbook by Dr. Joseph Angus. From page 150 of that work and onwards the most valuable hints will be met with. Much that we would otherwise have inserted in this volume is admirably stated by our learned friend.