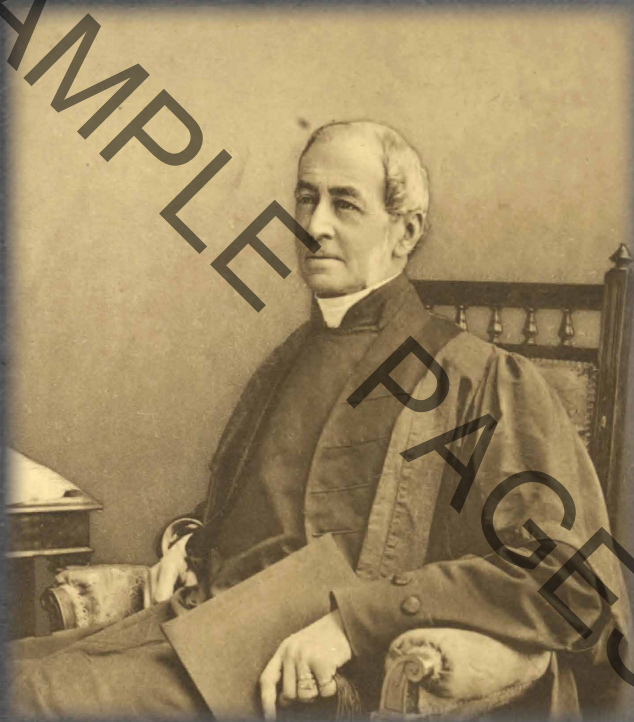


PLAIN COMMENTARY
ON
THE FOUR HOLY GOSPELS

VOLUME 11
LUKE & JOHN



BY
DEAN JOHN WILLIAM BURGON

SAMPLE PAGES

PLAIN COMMENTARY

ON

THE FOUR HOLY GOSPELS,

INTENDED CHIEFLY FOR DEVOTIONAL READING.

IN TWO VOLS.

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ASK FOR THE OLD PATHS, WHERE IS THE GOOD WAY, AND WALK THEREIN; AND YE SHALL FIND
REST FOR YOUR SOULS.—*Jeremiah vi. 16.*

GRANT, O LORD, THAT IN READING THY WORD, I MAY NEVER PREFER MY OWN SENTIMENTS BEFORE
THOSE OF THE CHURCH IN THE PURELY ANCIENT TIMES OF CHRISTIANITY.—*Bp. Wilson.*

VOLUME II.

ST. LUKE—ST. JOHN.

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P R E F A C E.*

THE question has been asked why the present is called a "Plain Commentary;" and what is precisely meant by "devotional reading." If the writer had been further called upon to explain why the quotations prefixed to his work express veneration for antiquity, he would have been furnished with all the heads requisite for those few introductory remarks which it has been his desire, all along, to offer on the completion of his work.

Complaint is often made of the want of an English Commentary on Holy Scripture; and it is not to be denied that, in the department of Exegesis, our Theological Literature is exceedingly deficient. But it seems to be not always remembered by those who complain, that students of the Bible are not all in search of exactly the same thing.

1. Thus, there are not a few readers who seem to approach the Gospels, for instance, in a purely critical spirit. From the style of their inquiries, it would scarcely be supposed that they were handling an inspired Work. They treat it exactly as if it were an ordinary narrative. To be warned against some popular mistake: to be furnished with a correct translation: to have the events which it records, reduced to true historical order; and to understand the allusions to manners, and natural phenomena:—such seem to be the chief objects of their desire. Readers of this class find writers of their own mental complexion: writers, who can be eloquent enough about the Pharisees and Sadducees; indeed, who have much to say on the subject of Jewish antiquities generally; are very exact in speaking of the Herods; very communicative concerning the geography of Palestine, and the observations of modern travellers; but who have little to communicate besides. They seem to make it a point of honor to be very dry on points of living interest. Their chief concern seems to be, to be *safe*. On every deep doctrinal statement, they affect at once the brevity and the ambiguity of an ancient oracle. Such writers are singularly prone to evacuate every profounder revelation of the SPIRIT, by a shallow suggestion as to its probable meaning; or they pass it by without a syllable of comment. Meanwhile, they compound for their silence when they should have spoken out, by many an useless remark on what is perfectly plain already; many a clumsy paraphrase of statements which require no paraphrase at all. We hear it sometimes said by readers of truer instincts, or who have been better taught, that such Commentaries "always tell them everything except the precise thing which they desire to know."

2. There is again another kind of Commentary which may be said to address

* [This Preface in the Oxford edition, was printed in connection with St. John's Gospel.]

it. It is to be expected, however, that it shows what *ver* is of a practical character; it hints to what may be called the uncontroverted principles. It devotes itself chiefly to the discussion of old difficulties, or to the discovery of new ones. The learned writer will fill his page with a dissertation about a date; enter into historical *exegesis* on the slightest provocation; try the patience of an ordinary reader by the tedious discussion of a various reading; or by aiming at exactness in points of purely technical or scientific interest,—on which, after all, nothing of a vital character can be said to depend. It might really seem as if it were never once suspected by writers of this class that the conduct of Zacheus in climbing the sycamore tree, is a far more interesting matter than the sycamore tree into which he climbed; that everything which our SAVIOUR said is ten times as important as the dialect in which He said it. But, to do this or that, these writers do not design their labours for the general reader; nor do they pretend to have produced a complete Commentary. Whatever their intention, their labours (which are yet very important in their way,) are so peculiar in their character, that they may well be considered to form a class apart.

3. Then, there are labourers of a higher order in the same field, whose criticism is mostly *philological*. Beyond all things, they are intent on noticing the grammatical peculiarities of the inspired pages. A rare word,—an unique phrase,—some anomaly of construction, *this* it is which chiefly delights many readers of the Gospel. It is in some such spirit that scholars are but too prone to approach the Book of Life. They have been known to dismiss a verse of Scripture when they have translated it exactly, and established the incorrectness of our English Version. Let it not be thought for an instant that we are speaking slightly of a class of men whose work we delight in. Their labours will be overlooked by none who value the Truth. It is to *them* that we owe our very acquaintance with those sacred Oracles for which we profess so much regard. But it may surely be declared, without fear of contradiction, that Commentaries of this class are addressed exclusively to the learned. And not only so, but their authors may surely be charged with dealing with the husk or shell only, which contains the fruit. They do not even profess to reach the kernel. They seem seldom, if ever, to touch *the life*.

For is it not the simple fact, that after historical criticism, and scientific skill, and geographical investigation, and antiquarian sagacity, and even scholarly commentaries, have all done their part towards the elucidation of the sacred text,—in very many instances, the work of *the Commentator* has yet to begin? Is not the labour of *Exegesis* quite a distinct matter? When St. John delivered this Divine Gospel into the hands of his awe-struck disciples, what kind of remarks are we to suppose that the Apostle and Evangelist made upon his Work? Did he in trust them in the force of the Greek article? (a) or reconcile his hour *to* with those of the other Evangelists? Did he tell them what the Jewish meant by saying to Pilate, "It is not lawful for us to put any man to death?" (b) or explain in what sense they proposed to "eat the Passover," (c)

All the notes in this Preface are taken from St. John xviii. 1-5.
1. St. John xviii. 1.

See St. John xxi. 14.
(a) St. John xxi. 28.

more than six hours after the Passover had been eaten by our LORD? Not so! It is at least very hard to believe that the Evangelist's remarks would have been of this character. True indeed it is that neither was it perhaps altogether *necessary*, in their case, that he should have discussed such questions with them. But then, did not his Gospel require a Commentary? If Jews required to have their understandings opened,^(c) in order that they might understand the writings of the Old Testament, do not Christians require some enlightenment in order that they may understand the writings of the New? What kind of remarks, then, (to repeat the question,) are we to suppose that the inspired Evangelist St. John would have made upon his own Work? Would he not rather have explained to His disciples the prophetic import of our SAVIOUR'S Miracles? and the meaning of certain of His Discourses? and why he had himself made such emphatic mention of the Water and the Blood which flowed from the wounded side of his Lord? and something about our SAVIOUR'S appearances after He was risen from the dead? In short, we are prone to believe concerning St. John, that if he made any Commentary on his own Gospel at all, his remarks were made in the way of *Interpretation* of it.

4. And this brings us naturally to the notice of that truest style of Commentary which attempts to interpret the difficult places of Holy Scripture; or, at least, never fails to call attention to them. *He* alone, in strictness, deserves the name of a Commentator, who *interprets* the profounder statements of the SPIRIT: who is at least suggestive, where he cannot be altogether explanatory; or admits that there is something in the sacred text which calls aloud for explanation, even while he confesses himself unable to explain it. Such a writer will gratefully avail himself of all subsidiary helps; but he will endeavour to keep steadily in view that the labours of critics and philologers are but means to an end; not the end itself.—It is manifest then, that we are now making allusion to a style of Commentary entirely different from either of the former. We are, in short, describing such a Commentary as few indeed are capable of producing: for it demands, in the first place, entire familiarity with the writings of either Covenant; and a large acquaintance with what our Fathers in the faith have delivered on the subject of Holy Scripture;—requirements which, in themselves, imply considerable learning. Next, there should be a vigorous yet chastened imagination, corrected by a sound and impartial judgment. There is needed besides, above all things, a holy life; freedom from party prejudice; and a submissive spirit, capable of prolonged and calm investigation. When all these qualifications are united, very little will yet be achieved, unless there be present a certain amount of that *Theological instinct*, in which it must be confessed that the moderns are, for the most part, lamentably deficient. Without this instinct, this attribute of a *Theological mind*, learning does but encumber: imagination does but mislead: modesty, candor, even holiness itself, must all prove unavailing.

5. There is yet another class of readers who resort to Holy Scripture neither

(c) St. Luke xxiv. 45.

to criticise its historical statements, nor to acquaint themselves with its linguistic difficulties, nor yet to have its hard places explained to them. They read the Gospels chiefly for their souls' health. They regard it as their daily bread, and depend on it for their daily portion. They rather shrink from a dissertation upon a difficulty, as they would from a domestic quarrel. They do not care to be told about the idiom of the Evangelist; and are rather annoyed than otherwise, at finding that the English Version of his Gospel requires correction. They are quite content with it, as it is. But if it must be corrected, (say they,) let it be done only in case of great emergency; and then, in the fewest possible words. In their simplicity, perhaps in their ignorance, they do but desire to lay their hand on the Book of Life, as the poor woman laid her hand on the hem of Christ's garment; and they know that virtue *must* come forth to heal them. Nay, they only value the elucidation of a mystery, as it is made thus to minister to edification. Those readers who, till lately, were generally driven to the pages of Doddridge or Scott, may be considered to represent, in excess, the class of readers of whom we are more particularly speaking. They read in a devotional spirit, and look for practical remarks on the sacred text; or at least they wish to be assisted in drawing inferences from it which may influence their own daily life and conversation.—This, then, is a fifth and a distinct kind of Commentary; and we will not attempt to define any further.

Of the five classes which we have described, the three first are essentially modern in their spirit; the growth of a late age and a remote country: while, under the two latter heads, conjointly, *all* ancient expositions of Scripture may be classed. A Commentary which should exhibit in perfection the conjoined characters of all five, might perhaps be called *complete*: but no such Commentary will ever be written; nor if it could be written, would it be generally read. It would, in the first place, be so exceedingly lengthy; and, in the next place, it would be so exceedingly miscellaneous. The scholar would complain that what he was in search of was lost amid remarks and reflections for which he had no leisure: the devotional reader would complain that he was forever interrupted by learned discussions for which he had no relish. Students of the approved model school would call everything that was not either exceedingly dry, or exceedingly shallow, fanciful and ridiculous. It is conceivable that their own business-like method would be yet more rudely characterized in return; and perhaps, with better show of reason. In short, it is impossible to contrive a Commentary which shall meet the requirements of *every* class of readers; and he who undertakes the difficult task of writing a Commentary at all, must make up his mind beforehand as to whom he proposes to teach; and what sort of information he intends chiefly to convey.

The present writer, then, did not design his work in the first instance for critical readers: still less did he feel that he was addressing scholars, on their own ground: least of all will his pages prove congenial to those who study the Gospel in a controversial spirit. Without by any means consciously avoiding real difficulties of *any* kind, or (as he hopes) overlooking the results of sacred

criticism, he desired rather to exhibit the results of learned inquiry, than to expose the process by which those results may be arrived at. He chiefly aimed at affording unlearned readers some real insight into the Gospel: and he called his work “a *Plain Commentary*,” not because it pretends to make everything in the Gospel plain; nor yet because the language is always such as a wholly uneducated person can understand: but because it contains no words of Greek or Latin,—no allusions which are beyond the reach of an educated person.

Next,—to mark his intention yet more fully,—the writer ventured to add that his Book was “intended chiefly for devotional reading.” He meant thereby, that although he wished that what he wrote might prove useful to learned and unlearned readers, alike; to old and young, wise and simple, the teacher and the taught;—his notes were yet chiefly intended for those who study the Gospel in a devotional frame of mind; who read it in order to live by it; and desire, while they read, to have their attention aroused, their heart informed, and their curiosity in some degree gratified.

It will be seen, from what has thus been offered, that the writer’s design was chiefly to exhibit the combined features of those Commentaries which belong to the fourth and fifth classes above described. He has already stated that the elder expositors of Scripture seem to have all written with the same intention; and he likes to believe that his labours will be found to bear some general resemblance to theirs, as well in respect of matter as manner.—As for the manner of those writers, it was,—to avail themselves freely of existing materials: to interweave the words of others with their own: to illustrate Scripture by a large use of Scripture: to be concise in the discussion of technical difficulties,—to be diffuse where important doctrine was involved; or where, in the course of the narrative, they encountered statements which could be turned to the reader’s profit. They never slumbered on Holy ground. To detect remote allusions,—to evolve unsuspected meanings,—to vindicate the importance of supposed trifles;—this was all their care. They did not append to the inspired pages a series of unconnected notes, to be referred to by the reader, or not, at his pleasure: but rather, they *discoursed* upon the Gospel, connectedly,—breaking off only to introduce the words of Inspiration: and proceeding again with their running comment.

As for the *matter* of the ancient writers,—it was, to say the truth, seldom altogether new. Novelty, in fact, seems to have formed no distinct part of their plan. *Truth*,—the handing down of *Divine Truth*,—was their great object. To transmit, pure and unpolled, the current of primitive doctrine; and to extend and enlarge Man’s knowledge of the Divine Oracles; was the business of each of the Fathers in turn. To the very full did they admit, (as their writings prove,) that striking sentiment of a great modern Doctor, that “it is not at all incredible that a Book, which has been so long in the possession of mankind, should contain many truths as yet undiscovered.”(f) Far from being

(f) Bishop Butler.

servile copyists, the most famous of them were great and original thinkers: bold in their speculations, often to the verge of rashness; so singular in their interpretations, as sometimes to incur the charge of extravagance or purility. But they knew how to make amends for their occasional falls, by many a flight like the eagle's. In the meanwhile, they showed clearly by the general resemblance of their method of handling Divine Truth, that they were not solitary and independent dreamers,—like the modern Germans, and the disciples of the German School among ourselves. Reverence, not timidity; sound Theological training, not imbecility of wit; made them—what they are. All this admits of easy illustration; and the subject is at once so interesting and so important, that we shall venture to invite the reader's attention to the following extract from Jerome's preface to his Commentary on St. Matthew:—

"You ask me, my dearest Eusebius, to furnish you with a brief exposition of St. Matthew's Gospel, which you may carry with you in your approaching journey to Rome,—like victual for the voyage. Your pertinacity in requesting such a Commentary, limited in extent yet pregnant in matter, surprises me; and sure am I that, had you remembered the answer I made you, you would never have invited me thus to attempt in a few days to execute a task which demands the labour of years.

"In the first place, it is difficult to go through all the authors who have written about the Gospels. Far more difficult, secondly, is the effort of judgment which is required to make a selection of what is best in each. I admit that I have read, (but it is a great many years ago,) Origen's twenty-five books of Commentaries on St. Matthew; together with his Homilies, being as many in number, and his Scholia. I have also read the Commentary of Theophilus of Antioch, and of Hippolytus the martyr; those of Theodorus of Heraclea, Apollinaris of Laodicea, and Didymus of Alexandria:—besides of the Latins, the short works of Hilary, of Victorinus, and of Fortunatianus. And certainly, even a little, picked out of the Commentaries of such writers, would well deserve attention. But you require me, in the space of two weeks,—towards the close of Lent, while the winds are blowing,—to dictate: thus allowing no time for the labour of writing, of correcting, of transcribing,—especially in the case of one like myself, who for three months have been so ill that I have scarcely yet begun to walk about again. The length of time allowed me is not adequate to the magnitude of the undertaking.

"The result has been, that, laying aside all consideration of ancient authorities, (whom I have no opportunity either to read or to follow,) I have merely attempted a brief historical exposition; (the thing which you said you wished for most;) into which I have occasionally interwoven the flowers of spiritual interpretation. A perfect work I reserve for a future opportunity." So far Jerome.

The inferences which may be drawn from this single passage are neither few nor inconsiderable.

For (1st,) here is one writing a short Commentary on St. Matthew, in A. D.

398, whose direct qualification for the task is found to consist in his acquaintance with what six Greek and three Latin Fathers have already written on the same subject; and he insinuates that, under ordinary circumstances, he should have felt it his duty to study *all* the Commentators, before venturing to put forth a new Commentary of his own.

2ndly, Jerome further implies that in the composition of such a Commentary, his special business would have been to exhibit the cream of what others had written. His labour would have lain rather in the judicious selection of ancient materials, than in the invention of fresh ones.

3rdly, The writers which he enumerates flourished from about A. D. 175 to about A. D. 370. There is therefore nothing to prevent the oldest of them, (Theophilus, Bp. of Antioch,)(*g*) from having conversed in his youth with a man who for many years had been a disciple of St. John. That the next in order of time, (Hippolytus,) had conversed with Irenæus, who remembered St. John's disciple, Polycarp,—is matter of history.

4thly, It is observable that the writers whom Jerome names were even more widely severed in respect of locality, than in respect of date. Thus Origen studied at Alexandria,—over the catechetical School of which famous city, Didymus also presided. Theophilus was Bishop of Antioch in Syria: Hippolytus was Bishop of Portus, near Rome; and Theodorus filled the see of his native city, Heraclea, in Thrace. Apollinarius, again, presided over the Church of Laodicea, in Asia Minor. Hilary, Bishop of Poitiers, is a noble representative of the teaching of the Gallican Church. Victorinus and Fortunatianus were Africans; but the latter was also Bishop of Aquileia in Italy. Although five of these writers therefore may be regarded as Jerome's contemporaries, it cannot be thought that their several productions were the growth of a *single school*. The reverse is the fact.

5thly, It should be observed, in the last place, that of the nine Commentaries thus enumerated, only one, (that of Hilary,) and part of another, (namely, Origen's,) are any longer known to be in existence.

We hesitate not to avow, that the general impression which we derive from such a survey of a single instance, is highly favourable to the claims of ancient expositions of Holy Scripture on our reverent attention. We entertain no extravagant theory on this subject. We are well aware that the Fathers had no authoritative Tradition, to guide them in the general work of Interpretation. Concerning *Doctrine*, indeed, there *was* such a prevailing Tradition: concerning the meaning of *single texts*, there *was not*. The Fathers are observed to reason about the sense of Scripture exactly as we ourselves reason at the present day: they never pretend to knowledge derived from any private source; and, of really difficult places, (such as abound in the Discourses of our LORD,) there are not unfrequently to be met with as many expositions as there are

(*g*) The general argument will not be at all affected by the admission,—which ought perhaps in fairness to be made,—that it has been doubted whether the work which Jerome here alludes to was the genuine production of the Father whose name it bore.

expositors. *h*) But while all this is freely granted, it is yet claimed:—equally true that a general consent of Fathers on *great* subjects is observable: as the reference of St. John xiii. to Holy Baptism, (*i*) and even of St. John vi. to the Holy Eucharist. Yet further, where the Fathers are not unanimous as to *what* is the precise mystical meaning of any given transaction, (as that recorded in St. John xix. 34,) they are nevertheless *quite* unanimous in pronouncing that the passage *has* a mystical meaning. There is not one of them who would subscribe to the doctrine of the Rev. Albert Barnes, which we have assigned to the foot of the page. (*j*) Above all, there is a family resemblance in the *method* of all ancient expositions of Holy Scripture which vindicate for them, however remotely, a common origin: a resemblance in the general handling of the inspired Word, which can only be satisfactorily explained by supposing that the remote type of all was the oral teaching of the Apostles themselves. For is it credible that the early Christians would have been so forgetful of the discourses of the men who had seen the Lord, that no trace of it,—no tradition of so much as *the manner* of it,—should have lingered on for a hundred years after the death of the last of the Apostles; down to the time when Origen, for example, was a young man? It cannot be! If the Twelve had indeed discoursed concerning the acts and sayings of our Blessed SAVIOUR, in the manner of the Rev. Albert Barnes, will any one believe that, at the end of one or two centuries, Christian writers of the East and of the West, of the North and of the South, could have all been found, with one consent, to write in a style so very dissimilar from that of the American expositor? Nothing short of a general conspiracy in the Church, or a special miracle, would suffice to account for so radical a discrepancy.

We believe, then, that ancient guides are more trustworthy on holy ground, than the moderns. Our reasons for thinking so, moreover, are now before the reader. The remarkable *general* consent,—the occasional *particular* consent,—of many men, writing in remote regions of the Church, about the same period of time; as Basil (*k*) and the two Gregories (*l*) in Asia Minor,—Epiphanius (*m*) in Cyprus,—Ambrose (*n*) at Milan,—John Chrysostom (*o*) at Antioch,—Jer-

(*h*) E. g. on St. John xiii. 31: xx. 17.

(*i*) "Of all the ancient," says Hefker, "there is not one to be named that ever either withholds or expounds a large place than as implying external Baptism."

(*j*) "It is probable, though it is not certainly expressed, that the left side was pierced by the spear. . . . The heart is surrounded by a membrane called the pericardium. This membrane contains a serous matter or liquor resembling water, which prevents the surface of the heart from becoming dry by its contact with it. It was this which was pierced, not the left ventricle in which the blood flowed. The point of the spear did not reach the centre of the ventricle of the heart; and the blood, yet warm, rushed forth, not mixed with, or full with, the water of the pericardium; so as to appear to shed blood, and not water to augment it. This was a natural effect, and would follow in any case. Observe how quietly the question is resolved in the exordium of this discourse. . . . very instructive in itself, which, in this place, seems to demand an apology."

(*k*) Of Cæsarea, A. D. 355—379.

(*l*) Of Nazianzus, A. D. 355—380: of Nyssa, . . . 394.

(*m*) A. D. 367—403.

(*n*) A. D. 375—397.

(*o*) A. D. 313—407.

ome(*p*) in Palestine,—Augustine(*q*) in Africa,—and Cyril(*r*) at Alexandria;—this fact strikes us as a phenomenon truly extraordinary. But when we further discover that it was the practice of those early commentators to borrow largely from their predecessors,—so that, in nine cases out of ten, the author is only handing down to us what another author had first handed down to him; when we can sometimes even trace the footprints of expositors back to the very age of the Apostles themselves, or the age which immediately succeeded theirs;—our surprise at their general coincidence of teaching, assumes the form of deference, and respect for their opinions. The phenomenon, we perceive, admits of only one explanation; and these venerable writers command at once the homage of our hearts, and the allegiance of our understandings.

For,—let it be asked in the next place,—What claims on our respect and attention have the moderns, as yet, established? When the modern method differs from the ancient, on what grounds do the moderns recommend their conclusions to our acceptance? The advances which have been made in Scholarship and in Science cannot be alleged in their behalf. Precious helps these are to investigation; but no one will pretend they can subvert *the method* of it; any more than recent improvements in the construction of telescopes, because they have made us acquainted with so many unsuspected wonders, have rendered the inductive method of reasoning an effete proceeding; or falsified the first principles of former mathematicians. How then do the moderns handle the sacred writings? Certainly, if we wanted to characterize their distinctive method by a single word, *irreverence* would be the term which we should apply to it. Were we invited to assign a second characteristic, it would be *shallowness*: if a third, *arrogance*. When the Gospels are in question, we read perpetually of the “dislocations,” the “inaccurate memories,” and the “mistakes” of “the Synoptists.” The “honesty” of supposed “imposters” is vindicated, or the “candour” of professing “witnesses” is pointed out. (It would never be imagined that the Gospel of JESUS CHRIST was the matter in debate! the Apostles of THE LAMB, the subjects of examination!) . . . The very origin of the Gospels has proved a fruitful source of prolonged debate,—especially among our German neighbours, who seem to have taken the “mythical narratives” vulgarly ascribed to St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. Luke and St. John, under their especial patronage and protection. Here, the alarming names of Eichorn, Büsching, Vogel, Ammon, Gratz, Ziegler, Weber, Bertholdt, Hug, Kuinoel, Gieseler, Fritzche, De Wette, Lücke, Schleiermacher, Paulus and Strauss, represent the combatants in the internecine strife. In the words of a great and lamented writer(s), (to whose memory the living representatives of this motley crew must bear no particular good-will;) — “Hypothesis here has been knocked down by hypothesis, till the Gospels must begin to feel themselves in a very awkward condition. If they were not written independently, —and that is flatly denied; if one was not copied from another,—and that is

(*p*) A. D. 363—430. The date of his Commentary on St. Matthew was A. D. 398,—according to Clinton, whose dates are here followed. (*q*) A. D. 386—430. (*r*) A. D. 412—444.

(*) The Rev. Hugh James Rose.

almost given up; if they were not derived from a single common document,—and that is growing out of fashion; if oral tradition does not account for their coincidences,—and we are assured that it cannot; at least we may flatter ourselves that they have not many further chances of escape. The method of exhaustion has almost done its work. The last hypothesis, which we think neither the Gospels nor our readers can possibly avoid, will be, that, in spite of *some* evidence from our senses, they were never written at all. This conclusion will be a most valuable adjunct to certain other great discoveries of the day, and will show in a most striking manner the march of intellect, and our incalculable superiority to our gross and ignorant forefathers."

In the department of sacred Exegesis, the writers for whom we avow so little partiality appear to us scarcely less objectionable. Do we encounter some deep saying of our Lord? They explain it at once away. Is our attention arrested by some mysterious transaction? The meaning of it is forthwith laboriously evaded. Commentators of this modern school present us largely with negative statements: and delight in the remarks and the reasonings which they term "subjective." But, (what seems unfortunate,) they can never so much as quite agree among themselves, as to the very authenticity of the record they profess to illustrate!

Schott and Lücke, we are informed, "occupy a prominent place among those scholars who deny the authenticity of the whole of the last chapter" . . . of St. John's Gospel. Kuinoel and Weber, on the contrary, flatter themselves that they "have proved most satisfactorily that no sufficient reason can be adduced for rejecting the body of the chapter, since *all the manuscripts contain it*; and since the ideas are characteristic of St. John (!!) and even the language itself presents no distinguishable difference from the style of his composition." (How candid and considerate of Messieurs Kuinoel and Weber to allow any weight to such a trivial circumstance as the combined testimony of every known manuscript of a Gospel!) Olshausen, however, amiably suggests that perhaps all that Messieurs Schott and Lücke mean was, "that some definite person, such as the presbyter John, for example, or even some one unknown, was the author of the chapter." (What a satisfaction, by the way, it would be to the Church to have this benevolent suggestion confirmed!) to be convinced that if the Evangelist St. John did not write his own Gospel, at all events that somebody else,—"some definite person,"—kindly wrote it for him!) . . . Olshausen's own private dictum, in the meantime, is that "the only result of the numerous investigations of this subject which commends itself to the understanding, and is confirmed more and more by inquiry, is that which regards *the last two verses* only as not having been written by St. John." In this charming forbearance towards the Evangelist, Tholuck agrees with Olshausen. But, (says the latter,) the first half of the chapter "appears poor and meaningless,"—unless we adopt the symbolical interpretation of the Fathers. It becomes else, "a lengthened unmeaning preface." Not so! (exclaims an amiable and highly accomplished living writer of our own; a dignitary too, and one whose writings are held in much esteem;) such "a length-

ened allegory" is "wholly uncongenial to the usual spirit of St. John's Gospel." The minuteness which Olshausen finds so "poor and meaningless," may be accounted for by supposing that St. John "delighted to record, or that the inquiring disciples would not pause in their questions till they had received, the whole account, even down to the minutest outward details." (t) . . . Well, (cries the perplexed student,) on *this* head, I may perhaps be permitted to think for myself. Suffer me at least to believe on *your* authority, that St. John wrote the last chapter of his own Gospel!—Alas, even this miserable solace is denied. "There are not wanting," (says the oracle,) "indications that the actual composition of it is by another hand than that of the Evangelist himself." (And here he refers, in a note, to the aforesaid Lücke.) "But these difficulties in the outward details of this chapter," (he continues,) "are not incompatible with the belief that we have, if not the very words, *at least the last recollections of the beloved Disciple; taken down, it may be, from his mouth; or written immediately after his death by the Ephesian disciples; but still substantially his own.*" . . . Can it be necessary to point out that conjectures, vague and unsupported and gratuitous as these, (for *reasonings* they may not, by any stretch of courtesy, be called,) are entitled neither to attention nor indulgence? Much learning the authors of them may possess; philosophers they may be, and wits and scholars too; but are such criticisms worthy of *Theologians*? Are *these*, above all, to be the guides of poor souls hungering for the bread of life,—reaching out for a hand which may sustain their tottering feet, and conduct them to "the well-spring of their own everlasting felicity?" (u)

Thus much, then, on the subject of ancient and modern expositors. And *now*, the reasoning will sufficiently appear why we have prefixed to our poor endeavours, two quotations expressing our own adherence to *the ancients*.—It only remains to speak a little more particularly about what has been here attempted.

If, after all that has been offered in a preceding page, it should still be objected that the present Commentary is not "plain" enough for plain readers, the author will but say in his own defence, that he found it practically impossible to say what he wanted to say in much easier language. It sounds like a paradox, but it is obviously true, that very often, in order to explain a difficulty, things must be said which a wholly unlearned person will find even more difficult than the thing to be explained. To be rather shallow in order to be very transparent, formed no part of the writer's plan.

(t) "Elsewhere *so unusual in St. John's Gospel*,"—adds the writer: whether justly or not, let the readers of St. John's Gospel declare. Consider the following places: chap. ii. 1 to 10: vi. 3 to 14: viii. 1 to 11: xi. 18 to 44: xiii. 4 to 12: xviii. 1 to 18: xix. 17 to 42: xx. 3 to 8.

(u) It would, of course, have been easy to adduce far more flagrant instances of licentiousness, from writers of less respectability than Olshausen, (whose work on the Gospels is full of merit,) and the esteemed author of "Sermons and Essays on the Apostolic age,"—if the present writer had desired. What has thus been adduced is merely offered as a favourable specimen of the language of a *school*,—the growing popularity of which, among our own people, no thoughtful man can witness without anxiety and apprehension. Pushed to its extreme development, such a method must lead inevitably to aberrations as miserable as those of Paulus and Strauss.

And yet, after a large admission of this kind has been made, he is deeply convinced that what he has written will be found useful to readers of a humble class; *that class*, in short, whose needs he had chiefly in view when he first took up his pen. No Commentary, of course, can reach the unlettered hind who is scarcely able to decipher the sacred text. It is useless to attempt to write books for persons who cannot read. But there is a large, and rapidly increasing class of readers, who, however imperfectly educated, can yet very well pick out the meaning of such remarks as are chiefly met with in these pages. The writer has had many opportunities already of convincing himself of this fact; and because he has cherished the hope to the very last of being useful to such persons, he has invariably contrived that every single chapter shall be comprised within such limits as to be capable of forming a separate tract.—In cathedral schools,—in the hands of the teachers and the elder children, especially,—the work will surely be found useful! Is it beyond the capacity of the better class of domestic servants? of small traders, and artisans? It is even thought that besides its use in the closet, such a work as the present, especially if it be studied for a few minutes beforehand, might be made available for reading aloud in the family.

Something should be said concerning the sources of the present work. The writer has availed himself, in the freest manner, of whatever he has at any time met with, which he thought would serve his present purpose; borrowing something from the most modern as well as from the most ancient sources;—from the excellent “Annotations” of Bishop Lonsdale and Archdeacon Hale, as readily as from the precious fragments of writers of the second century: from Bishop Andrewes, (an expositor of Scripture second to none in ancient or modern times;) Bishop Pearson; Dr. W. H. Mill, and the Rev. Isaac Williams; as freely as from Augustine, and Chrysostom, and Cyril. It seemed to him reasonable and right, moreover, when he met with anything which appeared to him felicitously expressed by another writer, to present the passage in that writer’s actual words; not to vary the language, in order to make the sentiment look like his own. This will account for the numerous quotations which will be found in the ensuing pages. But it may be necessary to remind the unlearned reader that he is not to suppose, whenever the aid of a modern author is thus invoked, that the sentiment quoted is therefore *peculiar* to that author. The great value of such expositors as Andrewes and Pearson and Mill is rather of the opposite kind; namely, that those men were so deeply imbued with the spirit of Patristic interpretation; had read the Fathers so largely, and to such good purpose; that they were for ever reproducing the ancient and the true expositions of God’s Word. Refer to the commentaries of Augustine and Chrysostom, on laying down Andrewes or Mill, and you recognize a hundred expressions immediately,—the germ of many a thought which those men have gracefully or learnedly expanded, and made entirely their own. But indeed it is scarcely needful to make the reference. The fragrance of the honey proclaims plainly enough where the bees have been feeding. . . . The chief value of such writings, then, proceeds from the very

circumstance which imparts such singular importance to the writings of the ancients themselves, — as was explained above, in the instance of Jerome : with this memorable difference, however, — namely, that almost all those very ancient Books have long since perished which supplied Augustine, and Chrysostom, and Cyril, and the rest, with their materials ; and further, that the best of the moderns are but learners in a School where *they* filled professorial chairs. Should it not, however, be cheerfully allowed that there arises at least one important counterbalancing consideration, when an ancient exposition is thus re-produced by a modern Doctor ; namely, that the sentiment thereby obtains the sanction of an independent mind, — trained under different influences, and furnished with all the appliances of modern learning ; superior it may be in judgment, and not unfrequently superior in power ; — after having stood the trying ordeal of at least fifteen hundred years ? — It may be stated, in conclusion, that the writer would have availed himself far more largely of the ample stores, ancient and modern, which he had at command, but that he prescribed to himself the rule of brevity ; in order to produce a Commentary within moderate limits. He was thus often *afraid* to consult fresh authorities ; and has always laid down his pen with regret. At the same time, the reader will not be aware *how much* has been offered on any given subject, unless he will be at the pains to refer, when directed, from one part of the Commentary to another. This operation may prove troublesome ; but a system of cross references was clearly unavoidable, — unless the same statements were to be repeated again and again in different parts of the work. The materials have been distributed, according to the writer's best judgment ; and the Commentary on each chapter has been made as readable, and it is hoped as interesting, as the narrow limits would allow.

The assistance which has been derived from living authors has been so faithfully acknowledged in the foot-notes, that particular allusion to it is the less necessary here ; but the writer feels that he ought to acknowledge his oral obligations to the Rev. Charles Marriott, — whose daily life and conversation has been to him a perpetual Commentary on the Gospel.

Very delightful, lastly, — (why should the writer be ashamed to confess it ?) — has been the favourable notice which his labours have from time to time obtained. Very encouraging have those public and private expressions of approval been, and he is very grateful for them. Very serviceable they have also proved : for indeed the labour of producing even a popular Commentary, like the present, is excessive, — far surpassing what most persons would suppose ; and though, in this instance, the labour has always been its own abundant and most blessed reward, yet has the writer many a time felt the need of a little encouragement during the countless weary days and nights of prolonged mental activity, which he has been compelled to bestow upon his task, — the difficulties of which he did not by any means foresee when he first undertook it. The dread of incautiously delivering an unsound, or (God forbid !) an heretical opinion : the awful responsibility of having undertaken to

explain our SAVIOUR'S discourses, and a miserable apprehension at every instant lest he should not be explaining them rightly: the constant fear of overlooking something of importance, for want of a little more investigation,—or lest, by yielding to the sense of weariness and fatigue, he should be doing any part of the work in a slovenly manner:—all this produced what was often felt to be a painful tension of the critical faculty. For the sayings of our LORD are (a) deep, (u) and sometimes, so perplexing; (v) the apparently trivial words of Scripture prove, not unfrequently, to be so full of unsuspected meaning; (w) the common narrative is so mysterious and divine; (x) that no ordinary vigilance, no ordinary amount of painstaking is necessary on the part of a Commentator. It is a very facile proceeding to say a few weak, lifeless words about a hard text; a very laborious one to ascertain what the most judicious of the ancients and moderns have said concerning it. Moreover, it demands a severe exercise of the judgment calmly and dispassionately to decide between rival interpretations; to select what seems to be, upon the whole, the best; and to present it to the unlearned reader in a few plain words. This kind of labour, persevered in for about three years;—as well in seasons of sickness and sorrow, as of health and joy; amid the pressure of other duties, collegiate and parochial; and (how often!) during those hours which God has allotted to Man for rest;—may well crave a little encouragement. The labour thus adverted to has increased as the work has proceeded. Whether because the writer grew more interested in his trade, as well as more skillful at it,—or because St. John's Gospel invites to deeper research, and will have more attention,—he is conscious that his exposition of the last sixteen chapters of St. John, together with the fourth, are the least imperfect part of his entire performance. Would that the rest were like it! . . . But in truth, the Commentary is *all* so utterly unworthy of its Divine subject, that, even in laying down his pen, and invoking a blessing on his labours,—the blessing of Him by whose SPIRIT the Gospel was given!—he desires nothing so much as that its many imperfections may be pardoned: that it may prove of use to many, and productive of mischief to none.

The Author would conclude by gratefully recording that he has compiled this Commentary, for the most part, in the shelter of a College,—a daily pensioner on the bounty of one who entered into rest more than five hundred years ago. He has thus endeavoured, (to adopt the language of pious Bishop Horne,) to give the world some account of that time and those opportunities which the Providence of a gracious God, and the munificence of a pious Founder, have placed within his power.

OXFORD, August 21st, 1855.

(u) E. g. St. John xv. 26; and see xx. 17,—the whole ver. c.

(v) E. g. St. John xv. 28.

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(w) E. g. St. Luke, iv. 1: xvi. 9.

(x) E. g. St. Matthew ii. 23: xxi. 2 to 8. St. Mark xi. 12 to 14. St. John iv. 12, where see the notes.

A PLAIN COMMENTARY
ON
THE FOUR HOLY GOSPELS.

ST. LUKE.

CHAPTER I.

1 *The Preface of Luke to his whole Gospel.* 5 *The Conception of John the Baptist, 26 and of CHRIST.* 89 *The prophecy of Elizabeth, and of Mary, concerning CHRIST.* 57 *The nativity and circumcision of John.* 67 *The prophecy of Zacharias, both of CHRIST, 76 and of John.*

ST. LUKE, who wrote his Gospel after those of St. Matthew and St. Mark had been published, will be found to supply many particulars of our LORD's life which the two earlier Evangelists omit. He was divinely guided to begin his Narrative from a much earlier period than they; and to "set forth in order" the history of the Birth, not only of our Blessed SAVIOUR, but of His Forerunner likewise. It has been piously, and reasonably thought, that he derived some of his information as to these events, (subject to the suggestions and guidance of the HOLY GHOST,) from the Virgin Mother herself. In the course of this portion of his Gospel, occur the three Inspired Hymns which make part of our Daily Service.

St. Luke then proceeds to relate the same events, generally, as are found in St. Matthew and St. Mark; but always with important differences, in matters of detail. Five consecutive chapters, however, (ch. xiii. to ch. xvii.) contain information peculiar to the present Gospel.

Though not actually one of the Apostolic body, he seems to have been an eyewitness of many of the events which he describes. (See below, the note on verse 3.) And there are places in his Gospel where he has been permitted to come wonderfully near his LORD; as when he describes the mysterious hour of His Agony in the Garden:—xxii. 41 to 46.

He begins his Narrative with relating something about himself; his qualification for the work of an Evangelist, and the purpose with which he wrote his Gospel:—where every word is full of wonder, and even of difficulty. The Reader will also, (it is trusted,) find that every statement may be turned to edification and delight, as well. St. Paul relates(^a) that St. Luke was a Physician of the Body. "The Brother, whose praise is in the Gospel throughout all the Churches,"(^b) is found to have been also a skillful Physician of the Soul.

1, 2 FORASMUCH as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us,

(^a) Colossians iv. 14.

(^b) 2 Cor. viii. 18.

even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eye-witnesses, and ministers of the Word:

These first four verses are called the "Preface" to St. Luke Gospel: from which, we learn many things of importance; as, first, that there was a time when, from the report of eye-witnesses, many narratives of our Lord's Life, besides the four which we now possess, had been committed to writing. But observe,—their Authors had "*taken in hand*" a task which they were not divinely commissioned to perform. It may be inferred from what is here said, that, to be in possession of the personal notices of eye-witnesses even, was not a sufficient qualification to enable a man to become an Evangelist; inasmuch as all the narratives here alluded to, have perished. St. Luke did not so "*take in hand*" to write a Gospel. The Holy Spirit moved him;—whereupon it seemed good to him;—and he wrote.

3 it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus;

You observe that St. Luke contrasts the way in which *he* had obtained his information, with that in which the "*many*" who had "*taken in hand*" to write a History of our Lord's Life, had obtained theirs. *They* wrote from tradition: St. Luke had enjoyed "*perfect understanding of all things from the very first,*"—probably as an eye-witness. The Church has indeed always inclined to the belief that he was one of the Seventy Disciples,—whose sending out, he alone describes in his tenth Chapter. *That* portion of Scripture is therefore appointed to be read on St. Luke's Day.

4 that thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed.

This, then, was the object with which this Gospel was written. The Evangelist seems to have bestowed all his labour in building up one Gentile heart in the Christian faith. And God blessed him in the deed; for thereby the whole Church of Christ hath been, and will be, edified for ever. Shall *we* sometimes disdain a narrow field for labour, and be discontented at having to minister (if need be) to a single soul?

About Theophilus, whom St. Luke addresses, we know nothing; but his name signifies "*Beloved of God;*" and (O reader!) be sure of this, that if *thou* art beloved of God, St. Luke's Gospel is specially addressed to *thee*.

5 There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judæa, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia:

David distributed the priests into twenty-four courses: (c) when "*the eighth*" came forth "*to Abijah.*" (ver. 10.) Zacharias was descended from one of the priests who belonged to *his* "*course.*"

and his wife *was* of the daughters of Aaron, and her name *was* Elisabeth.

The Old Testament names immediately meet us. "*Elisabeth*" is the same word as "*Elisheba,*" (d) and "*Mary*" as "*Miriam.*" (e)

6, 7 And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, blameless. And they had no child, because that Elisabeth was barren, and they both were *now* well stricken in years.

The expression in the original is,—"*they were both far advanced in their days;*" as if implying that this holy pair had well nigh reached the end of their earthly race.

(c) 1 Chron. xxiv. 1—19.

(d) Exodus vi. 2

(e) Exodus xv. 20.

8, 9 And it came to pass, that while he executed the Priest's office before GOD in the order of his course, according to the custom of the Priest's office, his lot was to burn incense when he went into the Temple of the LORD.

10 And the whole multitude of the people were praying without, at the time of incense.

Refer, here, to Leviticus xvi. 17.

11 And there appeared unto him an Angel of the LORD standing on the right side of the altar of incense.

The dawn of the Gospel takes place in the Temple of God.

Concerning the Altar of incense, see Exodus xxx. 1 to 9. It stood "before the veil that is by the ark of the testimony." Incense was symbolical of Prayer; whence it is said in the Book of Revelation that the "odours" in the golden vials, are "*the prayers of Saints*,"—chap. v. 8. See also Revelation viii. 3, 4; and the note on St. Matthew ii. 11 may be consulted.

We are reminded by this description of where the Angel stood, not only of the place of Session of the Eternal Son, (*f*)—but also that it was on *the right side* of the Holy Sepulchre that a heavenly Messenger was seen after the Resurrection of our LORD; (*g*) and on *the right side* of the ship that the net was lowered on the capturing of the second miraculous draught of fishes. (*h*)

12, 13 And when Zacharias saw *him*, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him. But the Angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son.

So that, in former years, Zacharias had prayed earnestly for children: but he had long since made up his mind that God had refused his petition. The Angel informs him that it was far otherwise.

Until this time, only two cases of conception, predicted by an Angel, are recorded to have occurred: namely, the prediction respecting Isaac, made to Abraham; (*i*) and the prediction respecting Samson, made to Manoah's wife. (*k*) See the note on St. Luke ii. 21.

and thou shalt call his name John.

See the note on the latter part of St. Luke ii. 21.

14, 15 And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth. For he shall be great in the sight of the LORD, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink: and he shall be filled with the HOLY GHOST, even from his Mother's womb.

That is to say, the vow of the Nazarite should be upon him, (as it had been upon Samson,) (*l*) from the time of his birth. Concerning that vow, see Numbers vi. 2, 3.

16, 17 And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the LORD their GOD. And he shall go before Him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the LORD.

This is best explained by a reference to the actual prophecy of Malachi, (iv. 5, 6,) alluded to by the Angel. "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD: and he shall turn the heart of the Fathers to the Children, and the heart of the Children to their Fathers." The Baptist came "in the Spirit and power of Elias," inasmuch as he was one who

(*f*) St. Mark xvi. 19
(*i*) Genesis xvii. 21, &c.

(*g*) St. Mark xvi. 5.
(*k*) Judges xiii. 3.

(*h*) St. John xxi. 6.
(*l*) Judges xiii. 4, 5.

"constantly spoke the truth, boldly rebuked vice, and patiently suffered for the Truth's sake."^(m)

18, 19 And Zacharias said unto the Angel, Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years. And the Angel answering said unto him, I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to show thee these glad tidings.

An awful, yet most calm rebuke, truly; and worthy of an Angel from Heaven.⁽ⁿ⁾ He that speaks to thee is Gabriel, (that is "the Man of God,") whose office in Heaven it is to stand in the presence of the Most High. — I, who in the days of old was sent to Daniel,^(o) behold am now sent with heavenly tidings unto thee! How must the heart, which a moment before wavered, have been overcome by the solemn recollections which every word of the glorious Speaker awakened!

20 And, behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed; because thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season.

So that Zacharias received a sign, though a very different one from what he had expected: and an appropriate sign it was; for behold, the faculty of speech, which he had misused to express mistrust in God's promises, was for a fixed time withdrawn. He became *dumb* moreover, as well as dumb; for, when the Baptist was to be circumcised, we shall find that the neighbours "*made signs*" to his Father, how he would have him called."^(p) ver. 22.

In the words actually employed by Zacharias, and the Blessed Virgin Mary, respectively,^(p) there does not seem to be much difference; but the Speakers were very diversely affected. While *her's* was the hesitation of *Faith*,^(q) which timidly asked for *explanation*,—*his* was the resistance of *Unbelief*,^(f) which required a *sign*. Hence, *her* doubt was solved,—*his*, punished.

21 And the people waited for Zacharias, and marvelled that he tarried so long in the Temple.

They were waiting for him to come out and bless them. "How was he honoured in the midst of the people in his coming out of the sanctuary?"—as it is said by the son of Sirach. "He went down, and lifted up his hands over the whole congregation of the children of Israel, to give the blessing of the Lord with his lips."^(r)

22 And when he came out, he could not speak unto them: and they perceived that he had seen a vision in the Temple: for he beckoned unto them, and remained speechless.

He could not pronounce the accustomed words of Blessing. Surely it was a highly significant circumstance that at the moment when the good tidings of the Gospel had been proclaimed, and an event had been announced by which the Law was to cease, the Priest should come forth from the Sanctuary of God with dumb lips! Consider St. Luke xvi. 16; and St. Matthew xi. 13.

23 And it came to pass, that, as soon as the days of his ministration were accomplished, he departed to his own house.

24, 25 And after those days his wife Elizabeth conceived, and hid herself five months, saying, Thus hath the Lord dealt with me in the days wherein He looked on me, to take away my reproach among men.

She speaks after the manner of the daughters of Abraham,—with whom, to go childless was accounted a reproach.

The case of Elisabeth more nearly resembles that of Sarah, than of any other

(m) Coll. et for St. John Baptist's Day.

(n) Daniel viii. 16; ix. 21.

(o) See verse 45.

(p) Compare Jude ver. 9.

(q) See ver. iv. 31.

(r) Ecclesiasticus i. 5, 20.

pious Matron whose history is given in the Bible :^(s) but Rebekah, Rachel, Manoah's wife, and Hannah, are all additional instances of that mysterious economy which from the beginning had been preparing the minds of faithful men for a Birth in "the latter days" which should be out of the course of Nature: the Birth of One whose name should be called "Wonderful." Accordingly, in ver. 36, we shall find the Angel Gabriel bringing forward this very case of Elisabeth, in order to reconcile the Mind of the Blessed Virgin to the mysterious destiny which was in store for herself.

26 An in the sixth month the Angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth,

No common Angel, but one of the highest order; as was meet, at the sending down from Heaven of the most Blessed message which had ever yet reached this suffering Earth.

That message was to exalt Human Nature above the Cherubim, by proclaiming the Incarnation of the Word. Yet the Archangel Gabriel hastens with love and obedience to fulfil his embassy. "And," to quote the pious words of Bishop Taylor, "if we were to reduce our prayers to action, and do God's will on earth as the Angels in Heaven do it, we should promptly execute every part of the Divine Will; though it were to be instrumental in the exaltation of a brother above ourselves."

27 to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary.

Something has been already said (in the Commentary on St. Matthew's Gospel) concerning the Divine Economy by which it was over-ruled that Mary should have been "espoused" to Joseph, at the time of the Annunciation; and immediately afterwards have become his Wife. See notes on St. Matth. i. 16, 18, 24. It was needful in this manner, at first, to shroud the mighty mystery of our Lord's Birth from the eyes of carnal men: and (what is more) it was seen fit by this masterpiece of divine contrivance, to defeat the vigilance of the Powers of Darkness also.

Do but note with what amazing simplicity, the most wonderful event which had happened in all the ages, is described! *This* was the hour for which Creation had groaned, ever since the Fall. The eyes of Patriarchs and Prophets had ever been turned in wonder and adoration towards *this* event. Faith and Hope had supported themselves "since the world began," in sure belief that the day for the disclosure of the great mystery here revealed, must at last arrive. When it came, how unlike did the manner of its coming prove, to what men had expected! The House was David's House indeed; yet, reduced to what a low condition! In the secrecy of her private chamber,—to a Virgin,—dwelling in a despised city,—far from Bethlehem of Judæa, the scene of the promises,—the Angel Gabriel brings the wondrous tidings which were destined to make all the ends of the Earth rejoice!

See the second note on St. Luke ii. 38.

28 And the Angel came in unto her,

The Angel came *in* unto her,—so that the Blessed Virgin was *within* when she heard the heavenly tidings. Sarah, in like manner, was "in the tent," when she heard the promise.^(t) In connection with this subject, consider the following texts,—St. John xi. 20; 1 Tim. v. 13; Tit. ii. 5.

and said, Hail, *thou that art* highly favoured, the LORD *is* with thee: blessed *art* thou among women.

The Angel is instructed to bid Mary "Hail;" that is, to bring her a message of *Peace* and *Joy*: whereby God revokes the sentence which He had pronounced on our first Mother,—"*In sorrow thou shalt bring forth children.*"^(u)

29 And when she saw *him*, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be.

(s) See note on ver. 37.

(t) Genesis xviii. 9, 10.

(u) Genesis iii. 16.

30 And the Angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God.

He calls her by her name,—as if to inspire confidence, and show that he knew her.

31 And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a Son, and shalt call His Name JESUS.

It should not escape notice that these words are formed exactly upon those of the prophet Isaiah vii. 14:(x) and what follows (ver. 32,) is a distinct allusion to another passage in the same prophet, namely ix. 6, 7.

32 He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the LORD GOD shall give unto Him the throne of His Father David.

Reminding her thereby of many an ancient prophecy which had gone before; and teaching her that the Off-spring of her body was to be none other than the Christ.

33 And He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of His Kingdom there shall be no end.

34 Then said Mary unto the Angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?

The Blessed Virgin clearly understood that this promise was made to her in her Virgin estate.

35 And the Angel answered and said unto her, The HOLY GHOST shall come upon thee, and the Power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that Holy Thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the SON of God.

By which words, it is worth observing that the Angel Gabriel declared to the Virgin the mystery of the Blessed Trinity.

There was this contrast between the Old and the New Creation; that whereas, in the first, God “spoke and it was done, He commanded and it stood fast;”—in the second, He wrought secretly and silently,—“coming down,” as the Psalmist speaks,(y) with reference to the days of MESSIAH, “like the rain into a fleece of wool, even as the drops that water the Earth.”

One of the very earliest of the Fathers, (Ignatius, second Bishop of Antioch,) says of this,—that it was “a crying mystery wrought in the silence of God: a memorable saying, which the Church has never been able to forget.

36 And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren.

Mary asked for no sign, yet a sign (the most fitting imaginable!) is given her;—given in love, not in anger as in the case of Zacharias.

Elisabeth was the Blessed Virgin’s “cousin.” Hence her wondrous son also was the Kinsman of CHRIST.

37 For with God nothing shall be impossible.

There is an allusion here to the words of Genesis xviii. 14. The case of Elisabeth resembled that of Sarah. See the note on ver. 25.

38 And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the LORD; be it unto me according to thy word.

And the Angel departed from her.

(x) Compare St. Matthew i. 21 and 23.

(y) Ps. lxxii. 6.

She submits to it, rather as a mysterious dispensation which she could not tell how to comprehend, than glories in it as a privilege. Her answer befits the Mother of One who was declared to be "meek and lowly;" owning herself but the Hand-maid of Him who was to be her Son.

Observe the wondrous contrast with what took place "in the beginning." At the Fall of Man, that old serpent, Satan, held parley with a Woman, and deceived her by the Spirit of Pride. In order to the Restoration of our Nature, an Arch-angel discourses with another Woman, and persuades her through her Humility.

And here, it may be well worth remarking (with Bishop Taylor), that "the holy Virgin came to her great perfection and height of piety, by a few, and those, modest and unattractive, exercises and actions. St. Paul travelled over the world; preached to the Gentiles and disputed against the Jews; wrote Epistles; suffered dangers, injuries, affronts, and persecutions to the height of wonder; whereby he won for himself a crown. But the holy Virgin attained perfection by the means of a quiet and silent piety, by internal actions of love, devotion, and contemplation: and instructs us that silent affections, the splendours of an internal devotion, the union of love, humility, and obedience, the daily offices of prayer and praises sung to God, acts of faith and fear, of patience and meekness of hope and reverence, repentance and charity, and those graces which walk in a veil and silence; make great ascents to God, and as sure progress to favour and a crown, as the more ostentatious and labourous exercises of a more public religion."

39 And Mary arose in those days, and went into the hill country with haste, into a city of Juda;

Thirty-eight cities of Judah "in the mountains," are enumerated in the Book of Joshua (xv. 48 to 60): but Tradition has always pointed out "Kirjath-Arba, which is Hebron,"(z) as the dwelling-place of the venerable pair to whom Mary hastened.

40 and entered into the house of Zacharias, and saluted Elisabeth.

She seems to have taken the holy pair by surprise, through the fervent haste with which she performed her journey. (The grace of the Holy Spirit knows nothing of slow endeavours!) Surely the mountains of that "hill country,"—the forest, and every tree therein,—broke forth into singing, and Earth was joyful; for the Lord had redeemed Jacob, and comforted His people.(a) "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings!"(b)

41 And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the Babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the HOLY GHOST.

These holy women, meeting to compare and unite their joys, and then made prophetic and inspired, must needs have discoursed like Angels; for (as a pious Bishop has remarked) all the faculties of Nature were turned into Grace. It is not easy to imagine the rapture of this blessed meeting. Never, but in Heaven, was there more joy and ecstasy!

42 And she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the Fruit of thy womb.

"Observe the "*loud voice*." Verily, if she had not spoken as she did, the very stones must have cried out!

Notice also, that she repeats the Angel's salutation; see ver. 28.

Rightly does Elisabeth call our SAVIOUR CHRIST, "the fruit of thy womb:" for she spake of One "who took Man's nature in the womb of the Blessed Virgin, of her substance."(c)

43, 44 And whence is this to me, that the Mother of My LORD should come to me? For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the Babe leaped in my womb for joy.

(z) Joshua xv. 54.

(a) Isaiah xlv. 23, and xlix. 13.
(c) Article II.

(b) Isaiah lii. 7.

It has been said,—“Grace introduces things to which Nature is a stranger.” The Forerunner, yet unborn, bears testimony to his yet unborn LORD;—a significant circumstance, surely; as indicative of the coming of a Kingdom where mysteries are hidden from the wise and prudent, but revealed unto Babes! ^(d)

We shall behold our SAVIOUR in like manner coming to His servant, (the Greater to the Less!) for Holy Baptism. See note on St. Matt. iii. 13.

45 And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the LORD.

Every word of this address ^(e) is clearly prophetic,—for which the declaration in ver. 41 prepares us. Elisabeth sees the whole extent of the mystery. Not only does she declare the present wonder, that Mary is the Mother of the Redeemer; and the future issue, that all things shall be fulfilled which have been foretold her; but she is able also to declare the state of heart in which her kinswoman received the Angel Gabriel's message: Past, and Present, and Future open to her prophetic sight.

Thereupon was poured forth the Divine “Magnificat,”—whose echoes yet fill the Churches of Christendom. The Hymn of the Blessed Virgin is manifestly constructed upon the same model as that strain of thankfulness which Hannah gave utterance to, on a similar occasion; ^(f) and with which indeed it should be compared throughout. The germ of both heavenly compositions is to be found in a yet more ancient Song,—namely, that of Sarah, contained in Genesis xxi. 6.

46, 47 And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the LORD, and my spirit hath rejoiced in GOD my SAVIOUR.

Now, “the fruit of the SPIRIT is Love, Joy, Peace.” ^(g)

Observe how she drops, in her exceeding exultation, the thought of self. Her joy is not in herself, but in GOD her SAVIOUR.

48 For He hath regarded the low estate of His handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.

She speaks not of her *poverty*,—and yet, she was very poor; but (after the manner of a Hebrew mother) her words have reference to the reproach of *childlessness* which God had removed from her. Compare ver. 25. What a profound and glorious meaning do the common words of rejoicing among the Mothers of Israel, ^(h) assume on the lips of the Virgin Mother of our LORD!—the “Blessed Virgin” let us call her,—and so, fulfill her prophecy.

49 For He that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is His Name.

“That Soul,” as Bede remarks, “can alone duly magnify the LORD, for whom He deigns to do mighty things.”

50 And His Mercy is on them that fear Him from generation to generation.

To quote the same writer, once more,—“As if she had said, Not only *for me* hath He that is mighty done great things; but in every nation, he that feareth God is accepted of Him.”

This is almost a quotation from Psalm ciii. 17.

51 He hath showed strength with His arm; He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

That is, Those who, in the imaginations of their hearts, are proud,—He hath scattered.

52, 53 He hath put down the mighty from *their* seats, and exalted

^(d) St. Matth. xi. 25.

^(e) Ver. 42 to 45.

^(f) 1 Samuel ii. 1 to 10.

^(g) Galat. v. 22.

^(h) See Leah's words,—Genesis xxix. 32: and Hannah's,—1 Sam. i. 11.

them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich He hath sent empty away.

With verses 51, 52, 53, compare the corresponding parts of Hannah's Song,—namely, 1 Sam. ii. 4, 5, 6, 7, 8.

The following places of Scripture will also be found worth referring to, in illustration of the three last verses, viz., Job v. 11; Psalm cxiii. 7; Ezekiel xvii. 24; xxi. 26.

Some of the wonders to be achieved by the Introduction of the Gospel are here glanced at. First, is described the dethronement and casting down of the Devil, and of all his evil host,⁽ⁱ⁾—together with the exaltation of “the poor of this world, rich in faith,” to be “heirs of the Kingdom.”^(k) Next, it is prophesied how they who hunger after Eternal Life with their whole soul,^(l) shall be filled, when CHRIST shall appear in glory; while they who, rejoicing in their self-righteousness, think themselves rich, shall in the end be sent empty away.

54 He hath holpen His servant Israel, in remembrance of His Mercy;

This verse seems intended to recall Psalm xcvi. 3.

55 as He spake to our Fathers, to Abraham and to his seed for ever.

The allusion in this verse to the last words of the prophet Micah (vii. 20) seems unmistakable.

The Blessed Virgin speaks, of course, of the true spiritual Israel. “For,” as St. Paul explains, “they are not all Israel, which are of Israel:”^(m) but “the Israel of God”⁽ⁿ⁾ are “such as are of a clean heart.”^(o) “*They which are of Faith, the same are the children of Abraham.*”^(p) And this promise is not narrowed by any limits; but to the very end of time there shall never lack believers,—whereby Abraham shall have a “seed, for ever.”

It is a divine thing that the Blessed Virgin should have thus glanced back to the beginning, from the end; and by this allusion to God's promise made to Abraham,^(q) should have virtually admitted, and in the very highest sense, “that there had not failed aught of any good thing which the Lord had spoken unto the house of Israel. All had come to pass.”^(r)

If any do inquire how it happens that this Hymn, poured forth in expression of the Blessed Virgin's Joy and Thankfulness, should have become a portion of the Church's Daily Service,—let them know that it does not contain one word of exultation but what every humble Christian may make his own. When the Eternal Word was made flesh, it was not, of course, the Blessed Virgin in particular, but mankind in general, which He designed to honour. The purpose of the Son of God, when He honoured the Blessed Virgin so far as in, and from, her to become Man, was to advance Human Nature by assuming it into the Unity of His Divine Person; so that, being born of her, He might procure not only hers, but our common Salvation. Every member of the great Human Family may therefore sing the “Magnificat;” and when he bears his part in that divine Anthem, should learn to make the Blessed Virgin's raptures a private and a personal concern:—“My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my Spirit rejoiceth in God my SAVIOUR; because He did regard the low estate of us poor mortal men,—His afflicted servants. For behold, in consequence of the Incarnation of the Son of God, all generations of mankind, aye, and every order of the Angelic Host, shall for evermore pronounce us ‘Blessed:’ for the Mighty One did mighty things for us, when He united Himself to our fallen Nature: wherefore Holy is He; and Blessed for evermore be His Holy Name!”

56 And Mary abode with her about three months, and returned to her own house.

During those three months Prayer and Meditation rather than converse, was surely the resource of this pair of holy Matrons: for unspeakable was the blessed-

(i) Compare St. Luke x. 18.

(k) St. James ii. 5.

(l) Compare St. Luke xv. 16, 17, 23 (the case of the Gentile world:) St. Matthew xv. 26, 27, &c.

(m) Romans ix. 6.

(n) Galat. vi. 16.

(o) Psalm lxxiii. 1.

(p) Galat. iii. 7.

(q) Genesis xii. 3, xvii. 7, &c.

(r) Joshua xxi. 45, and xxiii. 14.

ness to which they had been respectively called. And now, when Elisabeth was about to become a Mother, they parted; and we are not informed that they ever met again.

57, 58, 59 Now Elisabeth's full time came that she should be delivered; and she brought forth a son. And her neighbours and her cousins heard how the LORD had showed great mercy upon her; and they rejoiced with her. And it came to pass, that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child; and they called him Zacharias, after the name of his father.

Rather, "they were for calling him,"—"They wanted to call him." Compare St. Matthew iii. 11.

60, 61, 62 And his Mother answered and said, Not so; but he shall be called John. And they said unto her, There is none of thy kindred that is called by this name. And they made signs to his Father, how he would have him called.

They "made signs" to Zacharias, because he was now *deaf* as well as dumb. See the note on verse 20.

63, 64 And he asked for a writing table, and wrote, saying, His name is John. And they marvelled all. And his mouth was opened immediately, and his tongue loosed, and he spake, and praised God.

As Unbelief had bound him, so Faith now set him free. And, as an ancient writer remarks, it was but reasonable that when the voice of the Word came forth,—see St. John i. 23,—the tongue of his Father should have been loosed likewise.

65, 66 And fear came on all that dwelt round about them: and all these sayings were noised abroad throughout all the hill country of Judea. And all they that heard *them* laid *them* up in their hearts, saying, What manner of child shall this be! And the Hand of the LORD was with him.

67 And his father Zacharias was filled with the HOLY GHOST, and prophesied, saying,

The first purpose in which he employed the recovered gift of speech seems to have been the pouring out of that Inspired Hymn,—the "Benedictus,"—which Holy Church has since adopted as a part of her daily utterance. Well may she have done so! for every word here, prophetically spoken, has reference to the Spiritual Reign of Messiah; and the blessings commemorated, belong not to the nation of the Jews only, but, in the full extent of their signification, to all the people of God.

68 Blessed be the LORD GOD of Israel; for He hath visited and redeemed His people,

See how his prophetic speech glances on to the last page of the Gospel! And yet, it is not to be supposed that the inspired speaker had any conception of the sublime mystery which his words enfolded. He opened his lips to praise the God of Israel for having at last "visited,"—that is, "looked graciously upon," His people; and wrought for them the long-promised deliverance from their enemies: but he knew not the true nature of that deliverance, though he was divinely guided to call it by its proper name,—*Redemption*. See Ephes. i. 7: Coloss. i. 11: Rev. v. 9.

69 and hath raised up an Horn of Salvation for us in the house of His servant David;

Or, as it stands in the Prayer-book, "a *mighty* Salvation;" for "a horn" is the emblem—because, with certain animals, it is the instrument—of strength. Hence

such expressions as are found in Jeremiah xlvi. 25, Psalm lxxv. 4, 10, cxii. 9, &c. Compare 1 Sam. ii. 10, and Psalm xviii. 2: but especially Psalm cxxxii. 17.

Note also, that here and elsewhere, *Kingly* power is chiefly intended; whence "horns" actually stand for "Kings" in the Book of Daniel, and other parts of Scripture.(s)

70 (as He spake by the mouth of His holy Prophets, which have been since the World began:)

For the whole volume of the Old Testament is but one long prophecy of CHRIST: "Yea, and all the Prophets, from Samuel, and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days."(t)

To speak more truly, it was God, (as we learn from this place,) who spoke *by their mouth*. Compare the language of Acts i. 16, and see the note on St. Matt. i. 22. Our own Hooker has said on this subject,—“They neither spake nor wrote any word of their own, but uttered syllable by syllable as the SPIRIT put it into their mouths; no otherwise than as the harp or the lute doth give a sound according to the discretion of *his* hands that holdeth and striketh it with skill.” . . . It is remarkable that the very word for a Prophet, in Hebrew, is thought by the learned to imply *one who speaks as another moves him*.

This appeal to God's "holy Prophets of old," is introduced parenthetically: verses 69 and 71 must be taken together.

71, 72 that we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us; to perform the Mercy *promised* to our Fathers, and to remember His holy covenant;

According to the mind of the SPIRIT, the reference in this place is, of course, to ghostly, not to bodily enemies. CHRIST,—the Horn spoken of in ver. 69,—is declared, in ver. 71, to be "*Salvation from our enemies*," &c. And thereby, in the verse which follows, it is prophetically foretold that the LORD GOD of Israel was about "*to show mercy to our Fathers*, and to remember his holy covenant" with them.

73, 74, 75 the oath which He sware to our Father Abraham, that He would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him, all the days of our life.

Here, the HOLY SPIRIT is His own interpreter. The reference is to God's great oath to Abraham, contained in Genesis xxii. 16 to 18,—and alluded to in Hebrews vi. 13, 14. Compare the language of Psalm cv. 8 to 10.

It seems then, that those famous words,—“I will *bless* thee, and . . . multiply thy seed as the stars of Heaven,”(u)—were fulfilled, in their highest sense, when it was “granted unto” men, that is, *Power was given them*,(x) to serve God in Holiness and Righteousness(y) all the days of their life. For consider, that this was brought about by the out-pouring and gift of the HOLY GHOST; whereby God procured to the Father of the Faithful, in CHRIST, a spiritual seed, numerous as the stars of Heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea-shore. Compare Galatians iii. 14.

It appears further, that the words,—“Thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies,”—besides their obvious, historical sense, which was fulfilled in the days of King David,—received their perfect fulfillment in the days of the Gospel; when, by our SAVIOUR'S Advent, the Human Race were “delivered out of the hand of their enemies,”—Sin and Death. See Rom. vi. 18, 22. 1 Cor. xv. 24 to 26; also 55 to 57. Titus ii. 14. 2 St. Peter i. 4. 1 St. John v. 4, 5.—Take notice, by the way, that *these*, (which Zacharias mentions,) were the two great heads of Blessing which Eliezer seems to have recounted to Laban and Bethuel, when they sent away Rebekah to become Isaac's wife. See Genesis xxiv. 60.

And thus, it is declared that the entire fulfillment of all the glorious promises which God had once made to the Fathers, was now at length about to be performed to them;—for, as it is elsewhere said by CHRIST Himself,—“all,” (that is, all the

(s) Daniel vii. 7, 8. Zech. i. 18. Revel. xiii. 1.

(u) Gen. xxii. 17.

(x) Compare Rev. xi. 3.

(t) Acts iii. 24. Compare Acts x. 43.

(y) Compare Eph. iv. 24.

Fathers,—for He was speaking of *them*,—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,) “live unto Him.”(z)

“Blessed be the Lord, that hath given rest unto His people Israel, according to all that He promised. *There hath not failed one word of all His good promise which He promised by the hand of Moses His Servant.*”(a) In such terms could the wise King of Israel express his sense of God’s Faithfulness, Constancy, and Love. Where shall we find language adequate to the expression of ours,—we, “on whom the ends of the World are come?”(b)

76 And thou, child, shalt be called the Prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways;

The Father turns, in his prophetic rapture, to address his infant child; foretelling that he should “be,” (for *that* is the meaning of “being called,”) “the prophet of the Most High” God.(c) We have here, besides, an allusion to Isaiah xl. 3; so that the Gospel itself is briefly summed up in this inspired Hymn.

77, 78, 79 to give knowledge of Salvation unto His people by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the Dayspring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in Darkness and in the shadow of Death, to guide our feet into the way of Peace.

“Dayspring” is here a name of CHRIST; whether it should be translated the “East,”—or the “Sun-rising,”(d)—or the “Branch,” as in Zech. iii. 8. There is here an evident allusion to Isaiah ix. 1, (quoted in St. Matth. iv. 16;) but the *reason* of the expression “the shadow of Death” will best appear by a comparison with Psalm xxiii. 4; where, as Hammond beautifully points out, it is implied that the sunlight lingers longest on the hills,—the valleys being all the while veiled in gloom, and wearing soonest a funereal shadow.

80 And the child grew, and waxed strong in the spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his showing unto Israel.

The former of these two statements, we shall presently find repeated with respect to the MESSIAS. See ch. ii. 40.—The “deserts” here spoken of do not necessarily imply such a howling wilderness as that of Jordan. In Judea every tract of waste, uncultivated country was called a *desert*; whether its barren surface produced nothing but “reeds shaken by the wind,”(e) or whether there happened to be “much grass in the place.”(f) What is meant therefore probably, is, that the youthful Nazarite was brought up in solitude and retirement,—remote from all the influences of the Town. There, he increased in stature, and waxed strong in spirit; and, by “enduring hardness,”(g) prepared himself for the wondrous office to which the good Providence of God had designed him from his Mother’s womb.

For, instead of raiment, he wore a hairy garment and a leathern girdle. Moreover, God fed him with locusts; and “satisfied” him, from day to day, “with honey out of the stony rock.”(h) And thus, the Baptist grew to manhood; (for we hear no more of him until he had attained the age of thirty years;) an Orphan, doubtless, from his earliest youth. But be sure that “when his Father and his Mother had forsaken him, then the Lord took him up.”(i)

THE PRAYER.

We beseech Thee, O LORD, pour Thy Grace into our hearts: that, as we have known the Incarnation of Thy Son JESUS CHRIST by the message of an Angel, so, by His Cross and Passion, we may be brought unto the Glory of His Resurrection; through the same JESUS CHRIST our LORD. Amen.

(z) St. Luke xx. 38.

(c) Compare verse 32.

(f) Compare St. Matth. xiv. 13, 15 with St. John vi. 10.

(h) Psalm lxxxii. 10. Compare St. Matth. iii. 4.

(a) 1 Kings viii. 56.

(c) Compare Malachi iv. 2.

(h) 1 Cor. x. 11.

(c) St. Matth. xi. 7.

(g) 2 Tim. ii. 3.

(i) Psalm xxvii. 10.

CHAPTER II.

1 *Augustus taxeth all the Roman empire.* 6 *The nativity of CHRIST.* 8 *One Angel relateth it to the Shepherds.* 13 *Many sing praises to God for it.* 21 *CHRIST is Circumcised.* 22 *Mary purified.* 28 *Simeon and Anna prophesy of CHRIST.* 40 *Who increaseth in wisdom.* 46 *Questioneth in the Temple with the Doctors.* 51 *And is obedient to His parents.*

1 AND it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Cæsar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed.

A decree for a general enrolment and numbering of names, rather than for a Census of property, seems to be here spoken of. And the expression, "all the world," probably does not mean all the Roman Empire, but only the whole of Palestine.

2 (*And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.*)

Volumes have been written on this verse of Scripture. A person named *Varus* was President of Syria at the time here spoken of. Cyrenius (or Quirinus) did not succeed to the office till about eleven years after; but, (what is remarkable,) on coming to his Presidentship, he certainly did conduct a census. To reconcile the statement of the Evangelist with the known history of the period, has been felt to be a task of great difficulty.

But, it is to be observed, that St. Luke *does not say* that Cyrenius was *President* of Syria at the time of the "taxing." He merely says that he was, then, *governor* of the province; and this, Cyrenius may very well have been, although the Presidentship was in other hands. St. Luke's authority on a point of history is, of course, more trustworthy than that of any uninspired writer; and when he asserts, (as here he seems to do,) that "the taxing" at the time of the Nativity proved the first [of two] taxings which were made while Cyrenius governed Syria,—what difficulty need we feel in accepting the blessed Writer's assurance on the subject?—These remarks shall suffice: but the reader is referred to the note on St. Luke iii. 1: also to the notes on St. Matthew i. 16, and St. Luke iii. 36.

3 And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city.

This seems to imply the careful record which every Jewish family preserved of its descent; whereby they were enabled, on an occasion like the present, to repair to the city from which the founder of their line had originally come.

4 And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem;

Bethlehem was the true "City of David:" for his father, Jesse, was of that city.^(a) It appears also from a comparison of verses 11 and 15, that the Shepherds knew it by that name. But Jerusalem, as the Seat of David's Royalty, was now, almost exclusively, so called.

(because he was of the house and lineage of David:)

As St. Luke himself shows in the next chapter,—making use, it may be, of the

(a) 1 Sam. xvi. 1 and 4. Compare St. John vii. 42.