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"Because of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek thy good."
Psalm cxxii, 9.

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IMMUTABILITY OF GOD.

God is unlike all other beings in the universe. All other intelligences and all created things are subject to change, and are constantly changing. But God is unchangeable. He is the same, yesterday, to-day and forever, without the least variableness or shadow of turning. Angels and the spirits of the just have the image of God, and are in some degree like him in holiness and happiness. But they are still mutable:—although they are confirmed and elect, and exalted above the power of sin and death; they are changeable: for they are no doubt advancing in knowledge and happiness—rising to higher degrees of perfection; and every accession to their knowledge or happiness is a change. Immutability therefore, as well as the perfection of his attributes, distinguishes God from all other beings in the universe. “His ways are not as our ways, nor his thoughts as our thoughts, for as the Heavens are high above the earth, so are his ways above our ways, and his thoughts above our thoughts.”

That GOD IS IMMUTABLE, is a grand and important truth. An enlightened view of this attribute is indispensable to a knowledge of his perfections and government; and a knowledge of the character and government of God is the foundation of all true religion. The greatest mistakes in religion, both in sentiment and practice, among Christians and among Heathen, arise from erroneous or partial views of the character of God. This subject then, is an important one.

Before entering upon the discussion of it, it is proper for us to recollect, that in learning the character of God, in forming ideas of Him, the Bible, and the Bible alone, must be our guide; his Word and Spirit alone can direct us, for his nature and attributes are incomprehensible. They are too high to be attained by reason. They cannot be conceived by human understandings, or comprehended by finite minds. We are creatures of yesterday. We were, but a few days since, called into life, and opened our eyes for the first time on the works of God:—and we have, perhaps, exercised our reason very little, in inquiring about Him, and con-

instance of neglect, we are inexcusable. By a single act of irreverence towards them, we hazard our everlasting all. Whenever we open the volume, we open an *epistle from Heaven*; whenever we read, it is the infinite and eternal God that speaks.—But, if it is *false*, it is the grossest deception, and the greatest compound of superstition and folly the world ever saw. It deserves not only neglect, but contempt and the flames. Whence, then, this *half-way* attention? Are we not yet fully persuaded *whether there is any truth in the Bible, or not?* Whether there is, in reality, any futurity—a Heaven for the christian, and Hell for the impenitent sinner?—And how long shall we be doubting on this point, and neglect to examine the evidence we have? Even till convinced by the voice of the Archangel, and Trump of God? This we shall soon hear.—O ye who are “halting between two opinions”—consider what you do. Your eternal all is at stake; and, while you procrastinate, God may take away your soul,—and you are undone for eternity! THEODOSIUS.

IMPORTANCE OF HEBREW LITERATURE.

It is often important to dwell upon truths which are well known and generally admitted, especially when men are to be urged to practice. Truth must not only be proposed, but inculcated. This is my apology in venturing to propose for the consideration of your readers a subject so trite as the *Importance of Hebrew Literature*. Few are disposed to deny that a knowledge of the Hebrew language is desirable, and yet how few are seen, even among the clergy, who lay claim to such knowledge? It is hence evident, that whatever may be the general conviction on this subject, there is a lamentable defect in practice; and that something is wanted to stir up, by way of remembrance, the pure minds of those who neglect this important duty. From the many arguments which go to prove the importance of an acquaintance with the Hebrew language, I select the following.

1. *It is the primitive language, and that chosen by God as the depository of his earliest revelations.*—That the Hebrew is the original language of the Old Testament seems to admit of no doubt, and there is almost as little hesitation in believing it to be the language of the patriarchs, if not of our first parents. The names of men and places even before the flood are Hebrew; which would induce the belief that the language has been transmitted pure through the confusion of Babel. Now, in the literary enthusiasm of philologists and antiquarians, why should the most venerable of all languages be overlooked? Why should scholars take the time to learn ancient and modern tongues, to the neglect of this earliest language?

It might be supposed that the very circumstance of its being used by God as the medium of his communications would have invested it with an interest in the eyes of all pious people. But we proceed to an argument of far more weight.

2. *A knowledge of the Hebrew language is necessary to the understanding of the Old Testament*—In all other matters, this principle is acknowledged without hesitation. The diplomatist must learn the language of foreign courts, before he is prepared to treat upon important subjects. The merchant who travels to distant countries finds himself under the necessity of acquiring a new language. A foreigner would be thought most unfit to interpret our laws, if he should be acquainted with them only through a translation: and yet we acknowledge as a critic of the word of God, the man who does not understand one word of the language.—The Mohammedan, whatever tongue he may speak, whether in Central Africa, or in Bengal, reads his Koran in Arabic; he teaches the sacred language to his children, and will not hear of a translation. The Bramins, in addition to the spoken dialects of India, are all versed in the Sanscrit, the language of their Vedas. The Christian preacher, the business of whose life it is to interpret the word of God, spends the whole of that life in some cases, without hearing read one syllable of the original scriptures of the Old Testament.

To all this it is replied, that we have an excellent translation, which precludes the necessity of acquiring a difficult language. We have indeed one of the best versions which ever was written, yet it must be remembered that no translation however good, can possibly render a knowledge of the original unnecessary. With far greater reason, might we abjure classical learning, and read Xenophon and Livy in translations. And most gladly would I see our Grammar Schools closed, and the Greek and Latin Classics neglected, if we could in exchange have the Word of God in the original. Such a sacrifice, however, is needless, and it is shameful to the christian church, to see ministers of the gospel contented with the vulgar translation of the Bible, who at the same time maintain the necessity of classical learning, and give instruction in it to their children.

3. *It is necessary in defending the truth*.—It is well known that the most important controversies turn upon the interpretation of contested passages, and often upon the meaning of single words. Now, no preacher of the gospel knows how soon he may be called into this very sort of disputation. It is vain to say that he will abide by the decision of commentators and critics. No man can take refuge here without abandoning all independence of judgment, and acknowledging an implicit faith, more servile than that of the Papist.—Neither can any one reply that he is unfit for controversy, that he dislikes dispute, and hopes to escape it. He who undertakes to preach, is set for the defence of the gospel. He is bound to contend earnestly for the faith, and to be at all times ready to defend

the cause of truth against every opposer. He who is unable or unwilling to enter the lists against errorists and heretics, is unfit for the ministry of the gospel. And in this service, an acquaintance with the original scriptures is indispensable. To take a single instance. The controversy with the Unitarians rests almost entirely upon exegetical discussions. No man who is unacquainted with the scriptures in the original, can for an hour maintain an argument with an enlightened Unitarian. The controvertists of their party have made those subjects their special study, and if they are ever met successfully, they must be met on their own ground. The pestilent spawn of German criticism, must be counteracted in its baleful influence by the same means. Michaelis, Paulus, Kuinoel, Rosenmuller, Bauer, and their coadjutors in Deistical interpretation must be confronted, and defeated with their own weapons.

4. *It is necessary for the understanding of the New Testament.*—The New Testament was written by men, who though they spoke the Greek language, were in the habit of using the Syriac in their ordinary intercourse. Their Greek would therefore receive many of the idioms of their native country, so that we find the New Testament abounding in Hebraisms and Syriasms. These are so much alike that they may be classed under one head. If we would fully interpret the New Testament, we must therefore make ourselves acquainted with the Old, with the peculiarities of the Hebrew idiom, with the general forms of expression, borrowed from that language. Without this we shall be liable to continual mistakes, and shall read the New Testament with less improvement, and less pleasure.

5. *It is necessary for appreciating the force and beauty, and entering into the spirit of the Scriptures.*—If we were disposed to grant, (what we certainly do not grant,) that a man might possibly arrive at the exact grammatical interpretation of the Old Testament, without any acquaintance with the original, we should still maintain the importance of such acquaintance, since the force and spirit of many passages might still remain hidden. No one who is acquainted with more languages than one, can be ignorant of this truth. A literal translation cannot possibly convey the true import of figured or impassioned language. Much of the Old Testament is highly rhetorical, much is truly poetic. Now shall we strive to drink at the fountain the beauties of Homer and Virgil, and be content with a mere verbal translation of the word of God? Is it not desirable that in perusing a revelation from God, we should receive the exact impression intended to be conveyed,—the whole impression without diminution,—and the simple impression without the adulteration or admixture of any foreign idea? Now this is what no version can possibly effect. A literal translation is a mere outline without finish or coloring. A free translation communicates ideas alien from those of the author. It expresses plainly, where he insinuates a truth; it amplifies where he is concise, it exchanges one

figure for another, and fills the mind with associations which the original would never convey. In reading a version we commune with the translator rather than the author. Different translations of the same work produce impressions radically distinct. Read for examples Homer by M'Pherson, Pope, and Cowper; Tasso by Fairfax, Hoole, and Hunt.

It may be proper to advert to some of the objections which are made to the study of the Hebrew language. And here we leave out of the question those who object to the liberal education of the clergy, in general. These remarks are intended for none such. Their very tenets shew them to be incompetent to reason on such a subject. Objections arise sometimes from a different source, and even in the minds of conscientious and intelligent men. These deserve some attention. Among these objections are,

1. *The difficulty of the language.*—We have no royal road to knowledge, nor any desire to conceal the difficulties of the way; and there are discouragements in the commencement of this, as in the study of every language. Yet these difficulties are greatly magnified in the eyes of the ignorant and irresolute. "The slothful man saith, There is a lion in the way." The man who devotes himself to the ministry of the gospel ought to be a man of diligence, of patience, of self-denial; and patience and self-denial may be demanded in the study, as well as in the world. It is melancholy to observe that the literary pursuits of many clergymen, after the conclusion of their preparatory course, are directed rather by their capricious tastes and inclinations, than by any deliberate view of promoting the cause of Christ. But to this point justice cannot be done in a few remarks. We leave it, to observe that any man of ordinary capacity, who will devote a portion of every day to this study, may, in the course of a few months, begin to read the original Hebrew with entire satisfaction and understanding. There will doubtless be difficulties; but the man who dares not to brave them, deserves not even the name of student. Few of us will be more perplexed than the great Jerome. "What labor it cost me," says he, "what difficulties I went through, how often I despaired and left off, and how I began again to learn,—both I myself who felt the burden can witness, and they who lived with me. And I thank the Lord, that I now gather sweet fruit from the bitter seed of those studies."—One hour a day is surely little enough to devote to so important a subject; and this would secure a competent knowledge of the language in a few years.—There are degrees in this as in other kinds of knowledge, yet so much as it is needful to know, may be soon learned.

2. *Want of time,* is objected.—There may be cases in which this objection is conscientiously urged. Yet few subjects should take precedence of this. He who cannot take an hour may take half an hour for this study. Nay, a quarter of an hour daily will not be without its fruits.

Gutta cavat lapidem, non vi, sed sæpe cadendo.

And where is the man so occupied that he cannot spare fifteen minutes to the word of God? Most of us consume more time each day in dozing over newspapers and trivial productions, not to speak of idle reveries, unprofitable conversation, and morning hours spent in bed. The maxim of Dr Buchanan seems a good one, that a virtuous and diligent man may find time for every duty. Let the modern preacher, who is overwhelmed with such a world of business as not to have even a few minutes to spare, think of the labors of such a man as Luther,—let him look at his voluminous works, and ask how much leisure he had for such studies. Yet Luther, even in advanced life, was a laborious Hebraist. No one needs to be informed of the cares and duties of Thomas Scott; yet to quote the language of his son, “the Hebrew had been entirely resumed, and almost learned, since his fifty-third year.”* And in addition to this he acquired the Arabic and Susoo. To shew how much may be accomplished in a short time, let me extract from the life of Herman Witsius, the account of his studies for four years.

“Cœterum cum Orientalium linguarum studio apprime delectaretur, Clarissimo Viro Johanni Leusdenio, qui incredibili dexteritate linguas illas docebat, familiariter se applicuit, et sub illius præsidio totum ferme Hebraicorum Bibliorum Codicem interpretatus est, ut et Commentarios Solomonis Jarchii, Aben Ezrae, and Kimchii, in Hoseam, et Chaldaicam Jonathanis in Jesaiam Paraphrasin; et Onkelosi in partem Pentateuchi. Insuper Masoræ arcana, et Talmudis sribiliginosam dictionem, ex titulo Sanhedrin and Maccoth a Johanne Cocceio and ex titulo Babha Bathra a Constantino Lempereur editis, eodem præceptore attigit.”†

3. *Want of Books.*—Such was the apology for neglecting this branch of study half a century ago. Its force no longer remains. Hebrew books are now so common, that for ten dollars the whole *Apparatus Biblicus* may be obtained. The new and elegant edition of Van Der Hooght's bible sells in London for a guinea. The best Grammar and Lexicon will stand the Hebrew student in about the same sum.

4. *More important pursuits,* are urged as a reason for omitting this study.—Those ought to be important pursuits, indeed, which are to be preferred to the interpretation of the Scriptures. If what has been advanced in the former part of this Essay is correct, this objection has already been answered; and we would call upon every minister of the gospel seriously to examine into the subject, and into his duty in this particular.

5. *All men are not called to be critics.*—All men are not called to be Buxtorfs, Leusdens, or Lightfoots, for, as we have before observed, there are degrees in Hebrew literature. But all ministers of the gospel are called to be interpreters of the word of God. If what

* Life of Scott, Chap. xiii.

† I. Marckii Oratio Funeris in ob. H. W. p. 16.

has been said above has any force, they cannot be competent interpreters without some acquaintance with the Hebrew language. The more accurate and extensive this knowledge is, the better able will they be to expound the Old Testament.

May we not hope that the rising clergy of Virginia will lay this matter to heart, and that before a long time we shall see amongst ourselves eminent Biblical critics.

ATLANTICUS.

REVIEW.—Continued.

The Doctrines of the Church vindicated from the misrepresentations of Dr JOHN RICE; and the Integrity of Revealed Religion defended against the "No Comment Principle" of promiscuous Bible Societies. By the Right Reverend JOHN S. RAVENSCROFT, D.D. Bishop of the Diocese of North Carolina. 8vo. pp. 166. Raleigh:—Printed by J. Gales & Son, 1826.

THE BIBLE SOCIETY.

The Bible Society question next claims our attention, in the order of subjects treated by bishop Ravenscroft. And we are truly sorry to observe that he waxes warmer and warmer as he advances. We shall, however, pursue our course, noticing just such things as the cause of truth requires that we should animadvert on, and passing by the rest in silence.

In this discussion, it is very important that the true character of the Bible Society should be understood; and the real state of the question between the contending parties fairly exhibited.

1. As to the real character of the Bible Society,—This seems to have been sadly misunderstood by many of its opponents. We beg our readers, then, distinctly to bear in mind, that the *Bible Society is not a Church*. It assumes no ecclesiastical authority; it imposes no decisions on its members; it assumes no one attribute of a Church of the Lord Jesus. It is nothing more nor less than a *Company*, formed for the purpose of collecting and distributing money, in the way of charity. And as this association assumes no ecclesiastical character, so it interferes in none of its transactions with the operations of any of the Churches in Christendom. The object of the Society, is indeed, the same with that of every true Church of Christ, namely, the promotion of the Christian religion. But the church and the society move in entirely different spheres; so that there can be no collision, unless the church should go out of her proper course, to oppose the Bible Society. Every Protestant church in the world professes to derive its religion from the Bible; and in promoting what is believed to be the true religion of Christ, every church acknowledges its obligation to distribute the Bible as an important part of the means appointed by God for the salvation of sinners. But the Bible Society undertakes just this—It says to