

COMMENTARY

ON THE

GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. MATTHEW

BY

THE REV. W. BRUCE.

LONDON:

FREDERICK PITMAN, PATERNOSTER ROW.

1867.

P R E F A C E.

THIS Work has been written with the intention of supplying the members of the New Church with a Commentary on the largest and most comprehensive of the Gospels, suitable for private and family reading. It is therefore almost purely explanatory and practical in its character, all questions that have no direct tendency to edification being as far as possible avoided.

The author is indebted for some of his materials to the unpublished sermons of the late Rev. S. Noble. For the use of these manuscripts of his revered friend and colleague, his thanks are due to the Society of which Mr. Noble was so long the distinguished minister. To these manuscripts he owes, besides one or two smaller items, the explanation of almost the whole of chapters v. and vi., the greater part of chapter xviii., verses 14-16 of chapter xxiv., and the parable of the talents, in chapter xxv.

That the Work, such as it is, may, by the Divine blessing, contribute to the spiritual improvement of those for whose use it is designed, is the Author's earnest prayer.

LONDON, *December, 1866.*

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. MATTHEW.

INTRODUCTION.

THE Gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ is the most directly, if not also the most deeply, interesting and instructive portion of the Divine Word. It records the greatest of all earthly events—the manifestation of God in the flesh. It unfolds the mystery of redemption, and shows us the way in which we must be saved. It brings to light the immortality of the soul, and the nature of the future life. It shows us our nearness to and connection with the eternal world, and the influences which act upon us both from the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness. It exhibits before us humanity in its widest possible contrasts, in its greatest moral beauty in the person of the Saviour, and in its greatest moral deformity in the persons of those he came to seek and to save. It supplies us with the purest lessons of spiritual wisdom and the highest example of practical goodness in the teaching and life of our blessed Lord; in whose sufferings and death we have the most perfect pattern of patient endurance and forgiving love, and in whose resurrection and ascension we have the highest hope of spiritual life and eternal glory.

The word of the Old Testament is not silent on these all-important subjects. Predictions of the Lord's coming are numerous, and some of them are unmistakably plain and singularly graphic. Still, like every future event, his advent was seen as through a glass darkly. So were all the subjects of the kingdom he came on earth to establish. It is only when the light of the New Testament is shed back upon the predictions and doctrines of the Old, that they stand out in their proper distinctness, and that their high import is clearly and fully understood.

The Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, thus combined, contain the knowledge of that great salvation which the Lord, in his infinite mercy, has wrought out for, and now freely offers to all his people. Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and a life according to his commandments, are the sum and substance of the Christian

religion, the essential means and conditions of salvation; and these are set before us in the very letter with so much plainness that he may run that readeth.

But within the literal there is a spiritual sense, which exalts all the truths of the Word, and intensifies all the means of salvation. God has stored up in his Word, as he has in his Works, inexhaustible treasures of wisdom and knowledge; and has only, when the time has come, to open the seals of his Sacred Volume, which is written within and on the back side, and to unrol it before the nations, that they may "come and see" the wonders which have lain hid in its recesses, from the time of its revelation, till men were prepared, by a higher development of their faculties, to perceive and acknowledge them.

During the past ages of the church the Word has been understood in its literal sense only. The existence of a spiritual sense has always indeed been acknowledged in the church, although little success has attended the numerous attempts that have been made to unfold it. It was important that a belief in the existence of an inner sense in the Scriptures should be preserved, though the time for its manifestation was not yet come. The literal sense was adapted to the genius and adequate to the wants of the church of the Lord's first advent; the spiritual sense is revealed for the use of the church of his second advent. His first coming was in feebleness and obscurity; his second coming is with power and great glory. As it is from the literal sense of the Word that we acquire a knowledge of the Lord's coming in the flesh, it is from the spiritual sense that we acquire a knowledge of his coming in the spirit. The time of the Lord's second coming—a coming not in person but in power—having now arrived, the spiritual sense of the Word, which reveals it, is now made known, and may be understood, because the event and the revelation are the correlatives of each other.

The use of this inner sense of the Holy Word consists chiefly in its unfolding two great subjects—the glorification of the Lord's humanity, and the regeneration of man. These two works are related to each other as cause and effect. The Lord's glorification is the origin and pattern of man's regeneration. It is because the Lord was glorified that man can be regenerated. By glorification the Lord became a Saviour; by regeneration we become saved. Glorification and regeneration are the same in their nature; they differ only in degree. By glorification the Lord made his humanity Divine; by regeneration he makes man spiritual. These two works,

which are the beginning and the end of the Incarnation, are the leading subjects of the inner sense of the Holy Word. The inmost or celestial sense treats of the Lord's glorification, the internal or spiritual sense treats of man's regeneration. As the subject of regeneration has the nearest, because an immediate personal interest for us, and comes more within the scope of our apprehension, it will chiefly engage our attention, and will most conduce to our edification.

There is one other subject treated of in the inner sense of the Word—the church or religious dispensation, whose states both of advancement and retrogression form the subject of “the internal historical” or “proximate” sense, which is nearest to the sense of the letter.

In explaining the Word it may be useful at times to consider it as it refers to the Lord, or to man, or to the church, leaving the reader to trace out its other applications, which he may readily do, since there is a correspondence between them.

One word of caution for those who are not acquainted with the spiritual interpretation of the Word. It may be supposed that the spiritual sense supersedes the literal sense. This is by no means the case. There are some parts of the Word that are not to be literally understood. With the exception of these, the literal sense is at least as much believed in and revered by us as if no spiritual sense existed. All doctrine is to be drawn from the literal sense of the Word; and all spiritual truth rests upon it as its necessary foundation.

It is only necessary to add, that as the Holy Word, in which the fulness of wisdom dwells, is sufficient for the supply of all our spiritual wants, we have only to go to it earnestly and in a teachable spirit, looking to Him who is the Light itself for illumination, to derive from its sacred pages whatever is most suitable to our spiritual states, and most conducive to our eternal welfare.

CHAPTER I.

THE Old Testament begins with “the generations of the heavens and the earth,” and the New Testament begins with “the generation” of him by whom the heavens and the earth were created. In the Incarnation the Creator took upon himself by birth that nature which had originally derived its birth from him. He by whom man was made was himself made man. God assumed man's nature to effect what