

EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,
And many Explanatory Notes.

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PREFACE.

THE volume now in the reader's hands completes a work which I began sixteen years ago, entitled "Expository Thoughts on the Gospels." By the good hand of God that work is now finished. For this I desire to be deeply thankful. "Better is the end of a thing than the beginning of it." (Eccles. vii. 8.)

In concluding that portion of the work which is devoted to St. John's Gospel, I think it right to make a few prefatory remarks about the "Notes." They occupy so large a part of my three volumes on St. John, that my readers may not unreasonably expect me to give some account of them. Filling up, as they do, at least two-thirds of the work, and necessarily increasing its cost, they require some defence and explanation. Questions such as these will naturally arise in some minds,—“What are these notes? What is their object? What is their doctrinal tone? What helps have been used in preparing them?”—These questions I propose to answer.

(1) My *object* in writing these notes on St. John's Gospel is soon stated. I have tried to explain, in simple language, everything in the text which needs explanation, and to bring all available light to bear on every verse in the book. In trying to attain this object, I have given not only my own thoughts and opinions, but also the results of a patient study of about seventy Commentators, both ancient and modern, of almost every Church and school in Christendom. I have endeavoured to handle every subject raised by the text, however high and deep, and to meet the requirements of every class of readers, whether educated or uneducated. I have evaded no hard passage, and turned away from no difficulty. I am very sensible that I have often failed to hit the mark, and I have not been ashamed in many places to confess my ignorance. Competent critics will probably detect in the work not a few errors and mistakes. I lay no claim to infallibility. But I can honestly say that I have never handled the Word partially or deceitfully, and have done my best to show "the thing as it is." (Job xxvi. 3.) Some controverted points I have ventured to discuss in annotations of more than ordinary length, and of these a list will be found appended to this concluding volume. On the whole I cannot help hoping, that, in spite of many deficiencies, the notes will be found a help to thoughtful readers of St. John's Gospel.

(2) The *doctrinal tone* of the notes, I must frankly avow, is thoroughly and unmistakably evangelical. After patiently studying St. John's Gospel for twelve years, with much thought, much labour, much examination of the writings of others, and, I hope I may add, with some earnest prayers, my theological opinions are what they were when I began to write. In these twelve years I trust I have learned many things: but I can truly say that I have seen no reason to alter my views of doctrine. My conviction is firm and decided, that the theology of that religious school in the Church of Eng-

land, which, rightly or wrongly, is called Evangelical, is thoroughly Scriptural, and a theology of which no Christian man need be ashamed.

I freely confess that, with increasing years and experience, I have learned to think more kindly and charitably than I once did, of theologians who belong to other schools than my own. I am more and more convinced every year I live, that there are many Christians whose hearts are right in the sight of God, while their heads are very wrong. I am more and more convinced, that the differences between schools of religious thought are frequently more nominal than real, more verbal than actual, and that many of them would melt away and disappear, if men would only define the terms and words they use with logical accuracy. But, for all this, I cannot shrink from saying, as in the sight of God, that at present I know no theology which appears to me so thoroughly in accordance with Scripture as Evangelical theology. In the belief of this I have written my notes on St. John, and in the faith of this I hope to die. With the Bible only in my hands, I find difficulties in the systems of non-Evangelical schools, which to my mind appear insuperable.

(3) Concerning *the Commentators* I have consulted, in preparing my notes on St. John, I wish to make a few remarks for the benefit of my younger readers, and of those who have not access to large libraries. I see no reason to alter the opinions which I expressed seven years ago, in the Preface to my first volume. After patiently studying Cyril, Chrysostom, Augustine, and Theophylact, for twelve years, it is my deliberate conviction that their Commentaries on the Gospels are often overrated and overpraised, and that those who lead young students of theology to expect to find "all wisdom" in the Fathers, are neither wise nor kind. After an equally patient examination of the modern German Commentators, Tittman, Tholuck, Olshausen, Stier, and Hengstenberg, I am obliged to say that I leave them with a feeling of disappointment. About them also I raise a warning cry for the benefit of young students. I advise them not to expect too much.

Writers like Hengstenberg and Stier are well worth reading; but I cannot say that any modern German Commentators seem to me to deserve the extravagant commendation which is often bestowed on them. In fact I have a strong suspicion that many praise German theology without having read it!

For throwing light on the meaning of the text of St. John, and for raising just and beautiful thoughts out of it, my opinion is distinct and decided, that there are no Commentaries equal to those of the Continental divines who lived immediately after the Protestant Reformation. Unfortunately they wrote in Latin, which few persons care to read; and their books are, generally, huge, lumbering folios, which few care to handle. Moreover, they are sometimes defective in verbal criticism, and were, most of them, more familiar with Latin than Greek. But taking them for all in all, as Expositors

and Elucidators of God's Word, in my judgment, there is nothing like them. The man who has carefully read the expositions of Brentius, Bullinger, Gualter, Musculus, and Gerhard, will find that later Commentaries rarely contain any good thoughts which are not to be found in these five writers, and that they say many excellent things which have not occurred to later writers at all. Why these great Expositors are so totally ignored and neglected in the nineteenth century, I do not pretend to explain. Some modern theologians seem not even to be aware that such Commentators as Brentius, Musculus, and Gerhard, ever existed! But the fact is one which reflects little credit on our times.

I shall say little or nothing about the works of British Commentators. This is a department of theological literature in which, I must plainly say, I do not think my fellow-countrymen shine. With rare exceptions, they appear to me to fall below the level of their reputation. I shall therefore content myself with naming a few Commentaries, which appear to me more than ordinarily useful and suggestive, and which I have seldom consulted in vain.—Rollock on John is excellent; and it is a great pity that the whole work is not translated, instead of lying buried in Latin.—Hutcheson is always good; but his value is sadly marred by his interminable divisions, uses, applications, and inferences.—Matthew Henry is generally rich in pious thoughts and pleasing illustrations, and sometimes exhibits more learning and acquaintance with books, than he is commonly credited with.—Poole's "Annotations" are sound, clear, and sensible; and, taking him for all in all, I place him at the head of English Commentators on the whole Bible. —Alford and Wordsworth have done good service to the Church by their works on the Greek Testament, and I know none at present that I can sooner recommend to a student of the original. But they both say, occasionally, things with which I cannot agree, and they often seem to me to leave important texts very scantily expounded, or entirely unnoticed.¹ A fuller and more satisfactory commentary on the Greek Testament appears to me to be still wanted.—Burgon's "Plain Commentary on the Gospels" is an excellent, suggestive, and devout work. But I cannot agree with him, when he touches such subjects as the Church, the Sacraments, and the Ministry.—In fact, the conclusion I arrive at, after a diligent examination of many Commentators, is always one and the same. I trust none of them unreservedly, and I expect nowhere to find perfection. All must be read with caution. They are good helps, but they are not infallible. They are useful assistants, but they are not the pillar of cloud and fire. I advise my younger readers to

¹ As examples of what I mean, I refer the reader to Wordsworth on John xvii. 4-20, very scantily expounded, in my judgment; and to Alford on John x. 27, 28, not expounded at all!

remember that. Use your own judgment prayerfully and diligently. Use commentaries; but be a slave to none. Call no man master.²

It only remains for me now to express my regret, that the completion of my “Expository Thoughts on the Gospels” has been so long delayed. The delay has arisen from causes entirely beyond my control. The work was first begun in a little quiet parish of three hundred people, and then brought to a standstill by heavy domestic affliction. It has been resumed, and carried on, amidst many interruptions, in an isolated rural parish of 1,300 souls, in which, after coming into residence, I found a parsonage had to be repaired, large schools had to be built, and a huge old dilapidated church had to be restored. In the face of these difficulties and distractions, I can only wonder that I have been enabled to finish my work on St. John at all.

The book is now sent forth, with a deep conviction in the author’s mind, that it contains many defects, inaccuracies, and blemishes, but with an earnest desire and prayer that it may help some readers to a better understanding of one of the most interesting portions of Holy Scripture. I never felt more persuaded than I do in the present day of the truth of the old saying, “Ignorance of Scripture is the root of all error.” If I can lessen that ignorance a little I shall be very thankful.

The concluding paragraph of Dean Alford’s “Prolegomena” to his “Commentary on the Book of Revelation,” so thoroughly expresses my own feelings, on completing my work on St. John’s Gospel, that I make no excuse for inserting it here, with the omission of a few words:—

“I have now only to commend to my gracious God and Father this feeble attempt to explain a most glorious portion of His revealed Scripture. I do it with humble thankfulness, but with a sense of utter weakness before the power of His word, and of inability to sound the depth even of its simplest sentence. May he spare the hand which has been put forward to touch the ark! May He, for Christ’s sake, forgive all rashness, all perverseness, all uncharitableness, which may be found in this book! And may He sanctify it to the use of His Church: its truth, if any, for teaching; its manifold defects for warning.”

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² A full list of Commentators, whom I have consulted, more or less, in preparing my notes on St. John, will be found in the preface to my first volume. From that list the following authors were omitted,—Hengstenberg on “John,” Manton, Newton, Burgess, and Traill, on the “17th chapter of John,” and Bishop Andrews’ Sermons.