

EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,
And many Explanatory Notes.

BY THE REV. J. C. RYLE, B. A.,

CHRIST CHURCH, OXFORD,
VICAR OF STRADBROKE, SUFFOLK;
Author of "Home Truths," etc.

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JOHN XXI. 18-25.

18 Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldst: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry *thee* whither thou wouldest not.

19 This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me.

20 Then Peter, turning about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved following; which also leaned on his breast at supper, and said, Lord, which is he that betrayeth thee?

21 Peter seeing him saith to Jesus, Lord, and what *shall* this man *do*?

22 Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what *is that* to thee? follow thou me.

23 Then went this saying abroad among the brethren, that that disciple should not die; yet Jesus said not unto him, He shall not die; but, If I will that he tarry till I come, what *is that* to thee?

24 This is the disciple which testifieth of these things and wrote these things: and we know that his testimony is true.

25 And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen.

THESE verses form the conclusion of St. John's Gospel, and bring to an end the most precious book in the Bible. The man is much to be pitied who can read the passage without serious and solemn feelings. It is like listening to the parting words of a friend, whom we may possibly not see again. Let us reverently consider the lessons which this Scripture contains.

We learn, for one thing, from these verses, *that the future history of Christians, both in life and death, is foreknown by Christ.* The Lord tells Simon Peter, "When thou art old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not." These words, without controversy, were a prediction of the manner of the Apostle's death. They were fulfilled in after days, it is commonly supposed, when Peter was crucified as a martyr for Christ's sake. The time, the place, the manner, the painfulness to flesh and blood of the disciple's death, were all matters foreseen by the Master.

The truth before us is eminently full of comfort to a true believer. To obtain foreknowledge of things to come would, in most cases, be a sorrowful possession. To know what was going to befall us, and yet not to be able to prevent it, would make us simply miserable. But it is an unspeakable consolation to remember, that our whole future is known and forearranged by Christ. There is no such thing as luck, chance, or accident, in the journey of our life. Everything from beginning to end is foreseen,—arranged by One who is too wise to err, and too loving to do us harm.

Let us store up this truth in our minds, and use it diligently in all the days of darkness through which we may yet have to pass. In such days we should lean back on the thought, "Christ knows this, and knew it when He called me to be His disciple." It is foolish to repine and murmur over the troubles of those whom we love. We should rather fall back on the thought that all is

well done. It is useless to fret and be rebellious, when we ourselves have bitter cups to drink. We should rather say, "This also is from the Lord: He foresaw it, and would have prevented it, if it had not been for my good." Happy are those who can enter into the spirit of that old saint, who said, "I have made a covenant with my Lord, that I will never take amiss anything that He does to me." We may have to walk sometimes through rough places, on our way to heaven. But surely it is a resting, soothing reflection, "Every step of my journey was foreknown by Christ."

We learn, secondly, in these verses, *that a believer's death is intended to glorify God*. The Holy Ghost tells us this truth in plain language. He graciously interprets the dark saying, which fell from our Lord's lips about Peter's end. He tells us that Jesus spake this, "signifying by what death he should glorify God."

The thing before us is probably not considered as much as it ought to be. We are so apt to regard life as the only season for honouring Christ, and action as the only mode of showing our religion, that we overlook death, except as a painful termination of usefulness. Yet surely this ought not so to be. We may die to the Lord as well as live to the Lord; we may be patient sufferers as well as active workers. Like Samson, we may do more for God in our death, than we ever did in our lives. It is probable that the patient deaths of our martyred Reformers had more effect on the minds of Englishmen, than all the sermons they preached, and all the books they wrote. One thing, at all events, is certain,—the blood of the English martyrs was the seed of the English Church.

We may glorify God in death, by being ready for it whenever it comes. The Christian who is found like a sentinel at his post, like a servant with his loins girded and his lamp burning, with a heart packed up and ready to go, the man to whom sudden death, by the common consent of all who knew him, is sudden glory,—this, this is a man whose end brings glory to God.—We may glorify God in death, by patiently enduring its pains. The Christian whose spirit has complete victory over the flesh, who quietly feels the pains of his earthly tabernacle plucked up with great bodily agonies, and yet never murmurs or complains, but silently enjoys inward peace,—this, this again, is a man whose end brings glory to God.—We may glorify God in death, by testifying to others the comfort and support that we find in the grace of Christ. It is a great thing, when a mortal man can say with David, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil." (Psalm xxiii. 4.) The Christian who, like Standfast in "Pilgrim's Progress," can stand for a while in the river, and talk calmly to his companions, saying, "My foot is fixed sure: my toilsome days are ended,"—this, this is a man whose end brings glory to God. Deaths like these leave a mark on the living, and are not soon forgotten.

Let us pray, while we live in health, that we may glorify God in our end. Let us leave it to God to choose the where, and when, and how, and all the manner of our departing. Let us only ask that it may “glorify God.” He is a wise man who takes John Bunyan’s advice, and keeps his last hour continually in mind, and makes it his company-keeper. It was a weighty saying of John Wesley, when one found fault with the doctrines and practices of the Methodists,— “At any rate our people die well.”

We learn, thirdly, in these verses, *that whatever we may think about the condition of other people, we should think first about our own.* When Peter inquired curiously and anxiously about the future of the Apostle John, he received from our Lord an answer of deep meaning: “If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? Follow thou Me.” Hard to understand as some part of that sentence may be, it contains a practical lesson which cannot be mistaken. It commands every Christian to remember his own heart first, and to look at home.

Of course our blessed Lord does not wish us to neglect the souls of others, or to take no interest in their condition. Such a state of mind would be nothing less than uncharitable selfishness, and would prove plainly that we had not the grace of God. The servant of Christ will have a wide, broad heart, like his Master, and will desire the present and eternal happiness of all around him. He will long and labour to lessen the sorrows, and to increase the joys, of everyone within his reach, and, as he has opportunity, to do good to all men. But, in all his doing, the servant of Christ must never forget his own soul. Charity, and true religion, must both begin at home.

It is vain to deny that our Lord’s solemn caution to His impetuous disciple is greatly needed in the present day. Such is the weakness of human nature, that even true Christians are continually liable to run into extremes. Some are so entirely absorbed in their own inward experience, and their own heart’s conflict, that they forget the world outside. Others are so busy about doing good to the world, that they neglect to cultivate their own souls. Both are wrong, and both need to see a more excellent way; but none perhaps do so much harm to religion as those who are busy-bodies about others’ salvation, and at the same time neglecters of their own. From such a snare as this may the ringing words of our Lord deliver us! Whatever we do for others (and we never can do enough), let us not forget our own inner man. Unhappily, the Bride, in Canticles, is not the only person who has cause to complain: “They made me keeper of the vineyards; but my own vineyard I have not kept.” (Cant. i. 6.)

We learn, lastly, from these verses, the number and greatness of Christ’s works during His earthly ministry. St. John concludes his Gospel with these remarkable words, “There are many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose the world itself could not con-

tain the books that should be written.”—Of course we must not torture these words, by pressing them to an excessively *literal* interpretation. To suppose that the Evangelist meant the world could not hold the material volumes which would be written, is evidently unreasonable and absurd. The only sensible interpretation must be a spiritual and figurative one.

As much of Christ’s sayings and doings is recorded as the mind of man can take in. It would not be good for the world to have more. The human mind, like the body, can only digest a certain quantity. The world could not contain more, because it would not. As many miracles, as many parables, as many sermons, as many conversions, as many words of kindness, as many deeds of mercy, as many journeys, as many prayers, as many warnings, as many promises, are recorded, as the world can possibly require. If more had been recorded they would have been only thrown away. There is enough to make every unbeliever without excuse, enough to show every inquirer the way to heaven, enough to satisfy the heart of every honest believer, enough to condemn man if he does not repent and believe, enough to glorify God. The largest vessel can only contain a certain quantity of liquid. The mind of all mankind would not appreciate more about Christ, if more had been written. There is enough and to spare. This witness is true. Let us deny it if we can.

And now let us close the Gospel of St. John with mingled feelings of deep humility and deep thankfulness. We may well be humble when we think how ignorant we are, and how little we comprehend of the treasures which this Gospel contains. But we may well be thankful, when we reflect how clear and plain is the instruction which it gives us about the way of salvation. The man who reads this Gospel profitably is he who “believes that Jesus is the Christ, and, believing, has life through His Name.” Do we so believe? Let us never rest till we can give a satisfactory answer to that question!

NOTES. JOHN XXI. 18-25.

18.—[*Verily, verily, I say unto thee, etc.*] In this verse our Lord forewarns the Apostle Peter, what death he must expect to be the conclusion of his ministry. After restoring him to his office, and commissioning him to be a pastor, He tells him plainly what his end will be. He holds out no prospect of temporal ease and an earthly kingdom. On the contrary, He bids him look forward to a violent death. If he shows his love by feeding his Master’s sheep, he must not be surprised if he is made partaker of his Master’s sufferings. And so it was. Peter lived to be persecuted, beaten, imprisoned, and at length slain for Christ’s sake. It happened exactly as his Master had predicted. Most ecclesiastical historians say that he suffered martyrdom at Rome, in one of the first persecutions, and was crucified with his head downwards.

Melancthon remarks that Peter, like most Jews, was probably expecting that, after our Lord’s resurrection, He would take to Himself His kingdom, and reign in glory with His

disciples. Jesus warns him that he must expect nothing of the kind. Tribulation and not glory, was the prospect before him in this world.

It is fair to say that some learned writers deny entirely that Peter ever was at Rome, and consequently deny the truth of the ecclesiastical tradition, that he was crucified there with his head downward. Calovius gives a long passage from Casaubon, maintaining this view. Whether it was so, or not, does not affect the passage before us. In any case, wherever he died, there is no reason to doubt that Peter died a violent death.

The expression, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee," is thoroughly characteristic of St. John's Gospel. We cannot doubt that Peter would remember how solemn were the former occasions when our Lord used this phrase, and would see a peculiar solemnity in the words of this verse. Specially would Peter remember the night when our Lord was betrayed, when His Master said to him, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, The cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied Me thrice." (John xiii. 38.)

The expression, "When thou wast young," is commonly thought to indicate that Peter was now an old man, when these words were spoken. Perhaps too much stress is laid on the words, especially considering the context. I think the safe plan is to interpret it as meaning, "When thou wast a younger man than thou art now."

The expression, "Thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest," appears to me a general phrase, denoting the freedom from restraint and independence of movement, which Peter enjoyed, when he followed his calling as a young fisherman, before he was called to be a disciple and Apostle. I cannot, like some commentators, see any allusion to Peter's recent action, when he put his "fisher's coat about him," cast himself into the sea, and waded to the shore. I rather regard it as a proverbial phrase. A young Jewish fisherman, when inclined to go here or there, would, according to oriental custom, gird up his loins and walk off upon his journey, at the pleasure of his own will. "This," says our Lord to Peter, "thou didst use to do when a young man."

The expression, "When thou shalt be old," seems to denote at any rate that Peter would be an older man than he then was, before he died, and would suffer martyrdom in his old age. It certainly condemns the idea entertained by many, that the Apostle Peter was an aged man, when our Lord left the world. Old age, in his case, is clearly represented as a thing future.

The expression, "Thou shalt stretch forth thine hands, and another shall gird thee," is regarded by almost all commentators, as an intimation of the manner of Peter's death. He was to stretch forth his hands at the command of another, that is, of an executioner, and, in all probability, to be bound by that executioner to the cross on which he was to suffer. If this be a correct interpretation of the words, it certainly favours the idea that crucified persons were "bound," as well as "nailed," to the cross. The phrase "gird" may possibly refer to a custom of girding a person's loins, and putting cords round his middle before crucifying him. The contrast would then be more natural between a man girding up his own loins to walk, and another girding him round the loins for execution.

The expression "carry thee whither thou wouldest not," must mean that the executioner having bound Peter to the cross, would carry him so bound to the place where the cross would be reared up, after a manner which would be repugnant and painful to flesh and blood. It cannot, of course, mean that Peter would object to his punishment and resist it. It can only mean that his punishment would be one which must needs be a heavy trial to his natural will.

Brentius thinks that "another," in this sentence, refers to "Nero," or the "executioner."

We should note, in this wonderful prophecy, the unhesitating positiveness and decision

with which our Lord speaks of things to come. He knew perfectly all the circumstances of His Apostle's death, long before it took place.

We should note how faithfully and unreservedly our Lord tells Peter what the consequences of his apostleship would be. He does not tempt him onward by promises of earthly success and temporal rewards. Suffering, death, and the cross, are plainly exhibited before the eyes of his mind, as the end to which he must look forward.

We should note how even our Lord intimates that suffering is painful to flesh and blood. He speaks of it as a thing that Peter will most naturally shrink from: "Thou wouldest not." Our Lord does not expect us to "enjoy" bodily pain and suffering, though He asks us to be willing to endure it for His sake.

Chrysostom observes, "Christ here speaks of natural feeling, and the necessity of the flesh, and shows that the soul is unwillingly torn away from the body. Though the will was firm, even then nature would be found in fault. For no one lays aside the body without feeling; God having suitably ordained this in order that violent deaths might not be many. For if, even as things are now, the devil has been able to effect this, and has led thousands (by suicide) to precipices and pits, had not the soul felt such an affection for the body, many would have rushed to this under any common discouragement."

Augustine observes, "No man likes to die: a state of feeling so natural, that not even old age had power to remove it from blessed Peter, to whom Jesus said, 'Thou shalt be led whither thou wouldest not.' For our consolation, we may remember, that even our Saviour took this state of feeling on Himself, saying, Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me!"—He also says, "Were there nothing, or little of irksomeness in death, the glory of the martyr would not be so great as it is."

Calvin observes, "This must be understood as referring to the conflict between the flesh and the Spirit, which believers feel within themselves. We cannot obey God in a manner so free and unrestrained, as not to be drawn, as it were, by ropes, in an opposite direction, by the world and the flesh. Besides, it ought to be remembered that the dread of death is naturally implanted in us; for, to wish to be separated from the body is revolting to nature."—Again he says, "Even the martyrs experienced a fear of death similar to our own, so that they could not gain a triumph over the enemies of truth but by contending with themselves."

Beza remarks that on one occasion, when Peter and John had been beaten and threatened by the Jewish Council, "they departed, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His Name." (Acts v. 41.) The expression, "whither thou wouldest not," can therefore only refer to the natural will of flesh and blood. Flesh will feel. Holy Baxter in his last illness used to say, "I groan; but I do not grumble."

When Bishop Ridley was being chained to the stake, before he was burned as a martyr, at Oxford, he said to the smith who was knocking in the staple, "Good fellow, knock it in hard; for the flesh will have its way."

Ambrose, quoted by Jansenius, mentions a legend that when Peter was in prison at Rome before his martyrdom, he escaped, and was going out of the city. Then Jesus Christ Himself appeared to him in a vision, and on Peter asking, "Whither goest thou?" replied, "To Rome, to be crucified again." On hearing this, Peter returned to prison. The whole story is apocryphal, and destitute of historical foundation. But it shows the current of feeling among early Christians.

19.—[*This spake He...what death...glorify God.*] We have here one of John's peculiar parenthetical comments, and one for which we may be specially thankful. Who can tell what Commentators might have made of our Lord's prediction to Peter, if John had not been merci-

fully inspired to tell us that Jesus spoke of his death?

The expression “what death” means “what kind of death,” and is generally considered to indicate that the preceding verse describes death by crucifixion.

The expression “glorify God” is peculiarly interesting, because it teaches that a Christian may bring glory to God by his death, as well as by his life. He does so when he bears it patiently, does not murmur, exhibits sensible peace, enjoys evident hope of a better world, testifies to others of the truth and consolation of the Gospel, and leaves broad evidences of the reality of his religion behind him. He that so ends glorifies God. The deaths of Latimer, Ridley, Hooper, Bradford, Rogers, Rowland Taylor, and many other English martyrs, in the days of Queen Mary, were said to have done more good even than their lives, and to have had immense influence in helping forward the Protestant Reformation.

[*And when, ... this ... saith, ... Follow Die.*] The precise meaning of this short and emphatic phrase is not very plain.

(a) Some think that it must be interpreted literally, and that our Lord simply meant, “Follow Me in the direction where I am now going. We have tarried here long enough. Let us be going.” At first sight this seems a thin and weak interpretation. But before we reject it entirely, we should carefully observe the language of the next verse.

(b) Some think that “Follow Me” must be interpreted spiritually, and that our Lord used the expression as a kind of watchword for Peter’s course in life from that day forward. “Walk in my steps. Do as I have done. Follow Me whithersoever I lead thee, even though it be to prison and death.”

I see no reason why we should not adopt both views. There is such a depth and fullness in our Lord’s sayings, that I think we may safely do so. I therefore think it most probable that our Lord not only meant, “Arise, and follow Me now;” but also meant, “Always follow Me through life, whatever be the consequences.” After all, Christ’s three great words to Christians are, “Come to Me,—Learn of Me,—and Follow Me.” (Matt. xi. 28, 29.)

Is there not in the words, “Follow Me,” a latent reference to the remarkable saying of our Lord to Peter, on the night that Peter denied Him thrice: “Whither I go, thou canst not follow Me now; but thou shalt follow Me afterwards.” (John xiii. 36.)

20.—[*Then Peter, turning, seeth, etc.*] This verse brings in the Apostle John Himself, described with more than usual feeling and particularity, as “the disciple whom Jesus loved, and who leaned on his breast at supper,” as if to prevent the possibility of mistake.

The expressions, “turning,” and “following,” seem to me to place it beyond doubt, that our Lord began to move away from the scene of the social meal, when He said, “Follow Me.” No other view can explain them. There was a movement in a certain direction. As our Lord moved away, Peter followed Him. As he followed, Peter turned round, and saw John following also. After John, I believe, the other five disciples followed also, or else they could hardly have heard the remarkable saying about “tarrying till I come,” which they evidently did hear.

Tittman suggests that “When Peter saw John following he was displeased, as Jesus had ordered Peter alone to follow, with the intention of saying something to him apart. He therefore asked why Jesus permitted John to follow unbidden.”—He then thinks, if we adopt this interpretation, that the remarkable words of the following verse may only mean,—“If I wish him to remain with the other disciples until I return to them, that is no business of thine. Just follow Me.”—This however seems to me rather a tame interpretation.

Stier observes, “There was something wrong at first in Peter’s act of turning himself. He was commanded to follow, and not to look around. Thus there was certainly an uncalled-

for, and not artless, looking aside, a side-glance once more of comparison with others! After his deep humiliation here is still some light trace of the ancient Simon.”

21.—[*Peter seeing...Lord...what...this man do.*] The Greek words of Peter’s question would be literally rendered, “Lord: and this man what?” The precise meaning and object of the question are a point which has been much disputed.

(a) Some think that the question was entirely one of brotherly love, interest, and affection. They regard the inquiry as one which arose from Peter’s tender feeling toward John, as the disciple whom he loved most among the Apostles. He would fain know what was to be the future lot of his beloved friend and brother.

(b) Some think that the question was one of unseemly curiosity. They regard it as one which Peter ought not to have asked. If our Lord did not volunteer any prediction about John, Peter ought not to have made any inquiry.

(c) Some think, as Flacius, that there was a latent jealousy in Peter’s question, and that he seemed to suspect that John, not having denied Christ, would die an easier death than himself! I cannot think this for a moment.

My own belief is that there is truth in both the two first views. Our Lord’s reply to Peter, recorded in the next verse, certainly indicates to my mind that Peter ought not to have been so forward to ask. On the other hand, I should be sorry to say that Peter’s inquiry arose entirely out of curiosity, when I mark Peter’s unvarying connection with John on all occasions, and evident brotherly love towards him. In feeling concern about John’s future, after hearing about his own, Peter was not to blame. Grace does not require us to be cold and unfeeling about our friends. But in the manner of Peter’s inquiry there certainly seems to have been something to blame. Is there not about it a little touch of the old over-readiness to talk of others? It was once, “Though all men,—all others,—forsake Thee yet will not I.” It is now, “If I am to die a violent death, what are others to do?”

It is certainly my own impression that Peter’s question had special reference to John’s end: “if I am to die a violent death, what is to be the end of my brother John?”

Leighton, quoted by Burgon, remarks, “This was a transient stumbling in one who, but lately recovered of a great disease, did not walk firmly. But it is the common track of most, to wear out their days with impertinent inquiries. There is a natural desire in men to know the things of others, and neglect their own; and to be more concerned about things to come than things present.”

Henry remarks, “Peter seems more concerned for another than for himself. So apt are we to be busy in other men’s matters, but negligent in the concerns of our own souls,—quicksighted abroad, but dim-sighted at home,—judging others, and prognosticating what they will do, when we have enough to do to prove our own works, and understand our own ways. Peter seems more concerned about events than about duty. John was younger than himself, and in the course of nature likely to survive him. ‘Lord,’ he says, what times shall he be reserved for?’ Whereas, if God, by His grace, enable us to persevere to the end, and finish well, and get safely to heaven, we need not ask, What shall be the lot of those that shall come after us? Is it not well if peace and truth shall be in my days? Scripture predictions must be eyed for the direction of our conscience, not for the satisfying of our curiosity.”

It is a curious fact worth remembering, that John was one of the only two Apostles, whose future lot had already been spoken of by Christ. “He shall drink of the cup that I drink of, and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with.” (Mark x. 39.)

22.—[*Jesus saith unto him, If I will, etc.*] Our Lord’s answer to Peter can only be taken, in my judgment, as a rebuke. It was meant to teach the Apostle that he must first attend to his own

duty, mind his own soul, fulfil his own course, and leave the future of other brethren in the hands of a wise and merciful Saviour. He must not pry too curiously into God's counsels concerning John. What good would it do him to know whether John was to live a long life or a short one; to die a violent death or a natural one? Our Lord seems to say, "Leave off inquiring about thy brother's future lot. Thou knowest that he is one of my sheep, and as such shall never perish, and is in safe keeping. What is the rest to thee? Have faith to believe that all will be well done about him. Look to thine own soul and be content to follow Me."—I cannot help seeing a latent resemblance between this place and the well-known passage at the end of Daniel's prophecy. "Then said I, O my Lord, what shall be the end of these things? And He said, Go thy way, Daniel: for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end."—"Go thou thy way till the end be: for thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days." (Dan. xii. 8, 9, 13.)

Theophylact suggests that our Lord saw that Peter was vehemently attached to John, and unwilling to be separated from him, and therefore meant to teach him that he must do his own work and follow Christ, wherever He might lead him, even though separation from John might be the consequence.

After all we must take care that we do not omit the special point of our Lord's words. What our Lord rebukes is not general concern about the souls of others, but over-anxiety and restless curiosity about the future of our friends. Such over-anxiety indicates want of faith: we ought to be willing to leave their future in God's hands. To know their future would, in all probability, not make us one jot more happy. I can imagine nothing more miserable than to see in the distance tribulation and sorrow coming on our friends, and not to be able to avert it. Of what use would it have been to Peter, to know that his beloved brother John would one day be cast into a cauldron of boiling oil, at Ephesus, during a persecution? What good would it have done Peter, to know that John would spend years of weary captivity on the Isle of Patmos, and finally outlive all the company of the Apostles, and be left last and latest on the stormy sea of this troublous world? To know all this would not have done Peter the slightest good, and would more likely have added to his own sorrow. Wisely and well did our Lord say, "What is that to thee?" Wisely and well does He teach us not to be over-anxious about the future of our children, our relatives, and our friends. Far better for us, and far happier, to have faith in God, and to let the great unknown future alone.

Burkitt observes, "There are two great varieties in men with reference to knowledge. The one is a neglect to know what it is our duty to know. The other is a curiosity to know what it doth not belong to us to know."

In any case, the words "Follow Me" should always teach us that our first duty in religion is to look to our own souls, and to take heed that we ourselves follow Christ, and walk with God. Whatever others may do or not do, suffer or not suffer, our own duty is clear and plain. People who are always looking at others, and considering others, and shaping their own course accordingly, commit a great mistake. Of all weak and foolish reasons assigned by some for not coming to the Lord's Supper, the weakest perhaps is that very common one,—the *conduct of others* who are communicants! To such persons the words of our Lord apply with emphatical force, "What is that to thee? Follow thou Me."

The words of our Lord, "If I will that he tarry till I come," are a deep and mysterious saying, and in every age of the Church have received different interpretations.

(a) Some, as Gerhard, Maldonatus, and Wordsworth, hold that Jesus meant, "If I will that he tarry a long time on earth, lingering here long after thou art gone, until I come for him at death, what is that to thee?"—I cannot, however, admit the interpretation for a moment. Death and the coming of Christ are two totally different things, and it is an entire

mistake to confound them, as people often do (with very good intentions), in selecting texts for tombstones, as part of epitaphs. There is not a single passage in the New Testament, where the coming of the Lord means death. Moreover, the very next verse in this chapter seems to place the two things in strong contrast, as not the same.

(b) Some actually hold that Jesus meant that the Apostle John was never to die at all, but to remain alive until the second advent! This, however, is a wild and preposterous interpretation, which will satisfy no sober mind. Moreover, it is contradicted by the whole tenor of ecclesiastical history. All early writers, of any weight and authority, declare that John died a natural death in extreme old age.

Theophylact mentions a strange tradition that John is kept alive somewhere, and is to be slain, together with Elias, by Antichrist, when he appears!

(c) Some, as Grotius, Hammond, Lightfoot, Whitby, Scott, Alford, and Ellicott, hold that Jesus meant by His coming, not His second advent at the end of the world, but His coming spiritually in judgment, for the punishment of the Jews, the destruction of the temple, and the overthrow of the whole Jewish dispensation by the Romans. I cannot see this at all. I find no clear proof in the New Testament, that the overthrow of the Jewish dispensation is ever called the “coming of the Lord.” Moreover, it is an awkward fact, that it is commonly agreed that the Apostle John lived for many years after Jerusalem was taken, and the temple burned by Titus. Gerhard declares positively, that there is not one instance in Scripture of the destruction of Jerusalem being called the “coming of the Lord.”

(d) Bengel and Stier think it means that John was to tarry till the Lord came to reveal to him the visions recorded in the Book of Revelation.

(e) Some, as Hutcheson and Trench, think that Jesus did not mean to predict anything particular about John’s future, but only used a general hypothetical expression. “Supposing I do will that he stay till I come, what is that to thee? I do not say that I do will him to stay. But supposing it is my will, this is no affair of thine, and it becometh thee not to inquire.”

The question is one that will never be settled, and the sentence seems purposely left under a veil of mystery. If I must give an opinion, I decidedly lean to the last of the five views which I have stated.

23.—[*Then went this saying, etc.*] In this verse John carefully describes the rise of the earliest ecclesiastical tradition. He says that it became a common saying among the brethren, that he was not to die. Some very likely took it into their heads that, like Enoch and Elijah, he was to be translated and never see death, but pass into glory without dying. The Apostle takes pains to point out that Jesus never said that he was not to die, and had only supposed the possibility of his “tarrying till He came.” To my own mind his manner of stating the point is strongly confirmatory of the view I have already supported: viz., that our Lord only used a hypothetical expression, and did not at all intend to make a positive prediction.

We should carefully notice in this passage how easy it is for traditions to begin; and how soon, even with the best intentions, unfounded reports originate among religious men. Nothing is more unsatisfactory, nothing more uncertain, nothing more destitute of solid foundation, than that huge mass of matter which the Roman Catholic Church has heaped together, and professes to respect, called “Catholic tradition.” The moment a Christian departs from God’s Word written, and allows “Catholic tradition” any authority, he plunges into a jungle of uncertainty, and will be happy if he does not make shipwreck of his faith altogether.

Flacius observes, that not observing our Lord’s “if” gave rise to a tradition! A single word omitted in a text may do harm.

Henry remarks, “Let us learn here the uncertainty of human tradition, and the folly of

building faith upon it. Rev, was a tradition, an apostolical tradition, a saying that went abroad among the brethren. It was early; it was common; it was public; and yet it was false. How little then are those unwritten traditions to *be* relied upon, which the Council of Trent has decreed to be worthy to be received with a veneration and pious affection equal to that which is owing to Holy Scripture.”

Henry also remarks, “Let us learn the aptness of men to misinterpret the sayings of Christ. The grossest errors have sometimes shrouded themselves under the umbrage of incontestable truth, and the Scriptures themselves have been wrested by the unlearned and unstable. We must not think it strange if we hear the sayings of Christ misinterpreted, and quoted to patronize the errors of antichrist.”

The Greek phrase which we render “should not die,” is literally, “does not die.”

It seems impossible to avoid the conclusion, that the words which Jesus addressed to Peter were heard by the other five Apostles. Otherwise, the saying, or report referred to in this verse, could not have gone forth.

24.—[*This is the disciple, etc.*] In this verse the Apostle John makes a solemn declaration of his own authorship of the Gospel which bears his name, and of the truth of the matters which the Gospel itself contains. As usual, with characteristic humility, he does not give his name, but modestly speaks of himself in the third person. It is as though he said,—“Finally, I, John the Apostle, who leaned on Jesus’s breast, declare that I am the person who here testifies of these sayings and doings of Christ, and who has here written them down in this book, and I know that I have told nothing but what is true, and that my testimony may be implicitly trusted.”

The first person plural is here used by John, we should observe, just as it is in the beginning of his first Epistle.

The verse seems written in order to assure all readers of John’s Gospel that they need feel no doubt whatever that they have in this Gospel a faithful and true record of things that Jesus said and did, and that this, the last of the four narratives of Christ’s history, is just as trustworthy, credible, and dependable as the books written by Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

25.—[*And there are also many other things, etc.*] In this verse John seems to wind up his book, by breaking forth into a fervent declaration about the wonderful things which his Lord and Master had done. It is as though he said, “Though I finish my Gospel here, I have not told all the marvellous things that Jesus did while He was upon earth. There are many other things which he did, and many other words which He spoke, which are not recorded in my Gospel, nor yet in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Indeed, if they were written down every one, I suppose the world would not receive them, and could not comprehend their value.”

The words which we render, “The books that should be written,” would be more literally translated, “The books written.”

Brentius calls attention to the very large number of miracles which, according to St. Matthew, were wrought by our Lord, of which we have no special record in any of the Gospels. (See Matt. iv. 23, 24; xi. 5.) He justly argues that if these were all put down and described, it would greatly swell the Gospel narrative. What we have recorded is only a sample of what Jesus did.

Henry observes, that books might easily have been multiplied about Christ. “Everything that Christ said or did was worth our notice, and capable of being improved. He never spoke an idle word, and never did an idle thing; nay, He never spoke or did anything mean, little, or trifling, which is more than can be said of the wisest of men.”—But he wisely adds, “If we do not believe and improve what is written already, neither should we if there

had been much more.”

The expression which St. John uses in this verse about “the world not receiving the books,” is not without difficulty. It cannot of course mean that the material bulk of the books would be so large that the universe could not receive them. This would be absurd, as the “things” spoken of are only the things which Jesus did and said during the three years of His ministry. But what does the expression mean?

(a) Some, as Heinsius and Whitby, think that it means “the world, or unconverted portion of mankind, could not receive, take in, or comprehend more, if more was written. There is enough recorded for the conviction of sinners, and for the guidance of all who honestly want to be saved.”—It is a grave objection to this view, that the text does not say “the world” simply, but “the world itself.” Yet in fairness it must be allowed that in this sense the expression is rather like that in Amos: “The land is not able to bear all His words.” (Amos vii. 10.)

(b) Some think that the phrase must be taken as a strong hyperbolic description of the quantity and value of Christ’s works and words, during the period of His ministry, and that we must not press an excessively literal interpretation of the phrase. They argue that the figure called “hyperbole” is not at all uncommon in the Scripture, and that language is often used, when the idea to be conveyed is that of very great size, value, quantity, or number, which evidently cannot be interpreted *literally*. On the whole, I incline to think that this is the right view of the expression, and that it harmonizes well with the fervent, warm-hearted, loving character of the Apostle who lay on Jesus’ breast, and was commissioned to write the fourth Gospel. He ends with a heart full of Christ, and running over with love to Him, and zeal for His glory, and so he winds up just like himself.

The objection, sometimes made, that hyperbolic language is not consistent with inspiration, does not appear to me at all valid. No intelligent and careful reader of the Bible can fail to see that the inspired writers often use hyperbolic phrases,—phrases, I mean, that cannot possibly bear a *literal* interpretation, and must be regarded as a condescending accommodation to the weakness of man. For example; “Cities walled up to heaven.” (Deut. i. 28.) “A land that flowed with milk and honey.” (Josh. v. 6.) “Camels as the sand of the sea for multitude.” (Judges vii. 12.) All these are phrases which cannot be interpreted *literally*, and which any sensible person knows to be figurative and hyperbolic. Our Lord Himself speaks of “Capernaum being exalted unto heaven; “and says, “If any man come after Me, and hate not his father and mother he cannot be my disciple.” (Matt. xi. 23; Luke xiv. 26.) In both cases His language evidently cannot be construed literally.

Calvin observes, “If the Evangelist, casting his eyes on the mightiness of the majesty of Christ, exclaims in astonishment, that even the whole world could not contain a full narrative of it, ought we to wonder? Nor is he at all to be blamed, if he employs a frequent and ordinary figure of speech for commending the excellence of Christ’s works. For he knew how God accommodates Himself to the ordinary way of speaking, on account of our ignorance.”

This view is adopted by Augustine, Cyril, Bucer, Musculus, Gualter, Gerhard, Flacius, Ferus, Toletus, Maldonatus, Cornelius a Lapide, Jansenius, Pearson, Henry, Pearce, Scott, Tittman, Bloomfield, Barnes, Alford, Wordsworth, and Burgon.

Lampe protests strongly against the idea of any hyperbole being used, as barely reverent. But I cannot see any force in his argument.

The Greek word which we render “contain,” is the same that is rendered in Matt. xix. 11 “receive,” and in the same sense that it appears used here: “All men cannot receive this saying.”

The change from the plural “we know,” in verse 24, to the singular “I suppose,” in this verse, is undoubtedly peculiar. But there are parallel cases quoted by Doddridge. (Rom vii 14, and 1 Thess, ii. 18) Euthymius notes it, and thinks the insertion of “I suppose” was meant to soften down the hyperbole.

It is noteworthy that the word “Amen” is the concluding word of each of the four Gospels. It is equivalent to saying, “In truth, verily, it is so.” It is equally noteworthy that our Lord is the only person who ever uses the word at the beginning of a sentence.

I have now completed my Notes on St. John’s Gospel. I have given my last explanation. I have gathered my last collection of the opinions of Commentators. I have offered for the last time my judgment upon doubtful and disputed points. I lay down my pen with humbled, thankful, and solemnized feelings. The closing words of holy Bullinger’s Commentary on the Gospels, condensed and abridged, will perhaps not be considered an inappropriate conclusion to my “Expository Thoughts on St. John.”

“Reader, I have now set before thee thy Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ, that very Son of God, who was begotten by the Father by an eternal and ineffable generation, consubstantial and coequal with the Father in all things;—but in these last times, according to prophetic oracles, was incarnate for us, suffered, died, rose again from the dead, and was made King and Lord of all things.—This is He who is appointed and given to us by God the Father, as the fullness of all grace and truth, as the Lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world, as the ladder and door of heaven, as the serpent lifted up to render the poison of sin harmless, as the water which refreshes the thirsty, as the bread of life, as the light of the world, as the redeemer of God’s children, as the shepherd and door of the sheep, as the resurrection and the life, as the corn of wheat which springs up into much fruit, as the conqueror of the prince of this world, as the way, the truth, and the life, as the true vine, and finally, as the redemption, salvation, satisfaction, and righteousness of all the faithful in all the world, throughout all ages. Let us therefore pray God the Father, that, being taught by His Gospel, we may know Him that is true, and believe in Him in whom alone is salvation; and that, believing, we may feel God living in us in this world, and in the world to come may enjoy His eternal and most blessed fellowship.” Amen and Amen.