

The Hebrew Scriptures are the Fountain-Head of Revelation

As written in

"THE MORNING WATCH, JUNE 1829, ON THE TEXT AND VERSIONS OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES," pg. 133-148.

IN the prosecution of our periodical work occasions will continually arise for referring to the different versions of Holy Scripture, especially the early ones. As frequent will be our necessity for appealing to the fathers of the church, as witnesses to facts, as authorities in questions of doctrine, and as guides in matters of criticism. We therefore deem it good to give a general view of the principles which regulate our study of the Scriptures; first, by some remarks on the Hebrew and Greek originals; secondly, by a short history of those translations to which we shall most often refer, with our own estimate of their several merits; thirdly, by a hasty survey of the state of learning in the successive ages of the church. We shall thus see the integrity of the original texts; the sufficient means we possess for interpreting them; and ascertain what portion of learning the different fathers retained, and, consequently, know how far they are severally competent to decide in questions of criticism. Veracity constitutes a good witness to facts; judgment must be added to veracity, for deciding in doctrine; and, where both these are found in a man, if learning be deficient, he is entitled to no attention whatever in critical inquiries. We have often felt the necessity of these distinctions, when the authority of good men has been brought forward in support of disputable doctrine or of mistaken interpretation; and while we give its full value to piety in its own sphere, we deny that in criticism it has any claim to be listened to, beyond what it derives from the learning which accompanies it.

The Hebrew Scriptures are the fountain-head of revelation; like the waters of the rock Horeb, which came forth abundantly and followed the wandering of Israel (Exod. xvii. 6; 1 Cor. x.4), retaining their freshness and purity to the end. A student of ancient literature, knowing the innumerable losses and corruptions which have befallen other writings, is struck with the remarkable contrast which the Hebrew Scriptures present; these having been kept so entire and pure from the earliest antiquity. We at first piously and properly resolve their preservation into the providence of God; and this, to many minds, is a sufficient account of the phenomenon. But there are others who find both pleasure and profit in tracing out those secondary means which have been made subservient to a great purpose of God; and such discussions ought never to be undervalued, as they are intelligible to the natural man, and leave the unbeliever and the sceptic "without excuse." The Hebrew language, like the Jewish people, is a standing miracle, witnessing to the truth of God. The four Gentile monarchies have successively swept over the land of Judea, appearing to carry destruction in their course. Assyria, Persia, Greece, and Rome, where are they? Their national distinctions are gone, their languages are dead; their memorial remains only in the pages of history. But the Jews, on whom all their rage was directed, whom they scattered to the winds of heaven, not only still subsist, but retain their identity unbroken—nationality, language, ordinances unaltered—waiting only the restoration to their own land to become in all respects the same people as when Zion stood in palmy state. Two thousand years of oppression, under their last and most cruel persecutors, have not broken them down as a people, nor amalgamated their language with other tongues. This unbending character of the Jews was directed to the preservation of the Scriptures, by men raised up and qualified by God for that purpose,—the earlier Prophets, before the Babylonish captivity; Ezekiel and Daniel during its continuance; Ezra, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, afterwards. Till the coming of our Lord we are certain they had suffered no loss. "The Pharisees sit in Moses' seat; all, therefore, whatsoever they bid you observe, observe and do" (Matt. xxiii. 2). "One jot or tittle shall in no wise pass from the law" (Matt. v.18). The Hebrew Scriptures thus continuing pure till the New-Testament Scriptures were completed, and being by them authenticated, we shall point out some of the means which the providence of God has appointed for guarding them against human error since the Apostolic times, and which justify us in concluding that no material corruption could take place. The extensive collations of Kennicott and De Rossi confirm this conclusion, and shew that no errors have crept in affecting faith or doctrine, and that the mistakes of transcribers affect not the general integrity of the text.

Among the secondary means by which the Hebrew text has been preserved from corruption, we give the first place to the size and distinctness of its characters. We maintain that the Old Testament was from the beginning written in the square Hebrew character of the present day; a character incomparably the most noble of any in use, and worthy of being thought that which was inscribed on the tables of stone by the finger of God. But here a question arises: for though all are agreed that the present square character is as old as the time of Ezra, yet many men of name have argued that he first employed it in writing the Scriptures, and that before his time they were written in the Samaritan character. This opinion they derive from the assertion of Jerome, in his preface to Kings, " that Ezra found other letters, which we still use; whereas till his time the Samaritan and Hebrew characters, were the same; " and the statement of Eusebius in his Chronicon, " that Esdras collected the holy Scriptures, and, that they might not be mingled with the Samaritans, changed the Jewish letters." These statements they think are confirmed to demonstration by coins, said to be of high antiquity, bearing inscriptions in Samaritan characters. Before we shew the fallacy of these arguments, we must state the facts of the case: First, we have the whole Scripture in the square Hebrew, while the Pentateuch only is extant in the Samaritan; Secondly, in this fragment of God's word there are innumerable errors of transcription, from interchanging 1 and l, 2 and D, b and D; changes easily accounted for on the supposition that the original was Hebrew, where the letters have much resemblance, but utterly inexplicable on the supposition of a Samaritan original, where these interchanged characters have no such similarity; Thirdly, the coins are all of doubtful antiquity, and on the best of them the characters are so very barbarous that it is not easy to say whether they meant to imitate the Hebrew or the Samaritan character. But compare the two characters together, and we ask, whether it be probable that the barbarous Samaritan could have been the source whence the grand Hebrew character was derived. That the Hebrew might degenerate into the Samaritan, is a perfectly natural supposition; but that the distorted Samaritan could be the source of the simple and regular Hebrew, appears to us a preposterous idea. Moreover, let us see from Scripture what the character of these Samaritans was. "At the beginning of their dwelling there, they feared not the Lord" (2 Kings xvii. 25): "Then one of the priests, whom they had carried away from Samaria, came and dwelt in Bethel, and taught them how they should fear the Lord: howbeit, every nation made gods of their own" (ver. 28). "So these nations feared the Lord and served their graven images, both their children and their children's children; as did their fathers, so do they unto this day" (ver. 41). Is this the kind of people among whom we may expect to find the original Scriptures? The truth we believe to have been this, that the Israelites, like all the other early nations, had a sacred character which was only employed in religion, and a less exact character for the ordinary business of life. The square Hebrew we believe to have been their sacred character, and that one like the Samaritan they used in civil affairs. We may grant that during the Babylonish captivity the people had forgotten, or much corrupted, their language; while we maintain that among the priests and prophets the Hebrew was preserved in its purity. Jeremiah, putting words into the mouth of the Jews for addressing the Chaldeans, has one verse in Chaldee (x. 11), but he sent them letters to Babylon in pure Hebrew (Jer. li. 60.) Ezekiel was contemporary both with Jeremiah and Daniel. Daniel knew by books that the captivity predicted by Jeremiah was accomplished. (Dan. ix. 2.) And Ezra was a scribe of the law of the God of heaven. (Ezra vii. 12.) All those parts of Daniel which were meant for the Jewish people, are pure Hebrew; and those parts only in the Chaldee dialect which relate to the affairs of Chaldea. The sacred books, we maintain, had not been changed; for it was their remaining pure, while the language of the people had grown corrupt, which made it necessary to give "the sense, and cause them to understand the reading." (Neh. viii. 8.) If Ezra read from a book whose language they had well-nigh forgotten, interpretation was a necessary work; but if he had already translated the book into a language with which they were familiar, simply reading it would suffice, and the interpretation might have been spared, as superfluous. Nor is it at all likely that Ezra would have so accommodated it to the people, his object being to bring them back to the Lord; and he would seek to direct their thoughts wholly to the law of Moses and the language of their fathers, not to wean them from it. From the time of Ezra, the Syriac seems to have been the common character in Palestine; and to almost as early a period we can trace back the Rabbinical character: both of these are regularly derived from the Hebrew: and if we suppose Jerome to have meant some character similar to these, which Ezra invented for civil affairs, all difficulty

vanishes, and we can reconcile those passages in his writings which on the ordinary hypothesis appear contradictory; for he uniformly quotes from the Hebrew as the original, and speaks slightly of the Samaritan.

The argument derived from coins may be more briefly dispatched. If these coins are genuine, and there was a sacred and common character in use at the same time, those stamped with the sacred character might be shekels of the sanctuary; the others, ordinary shekels; and Kircher says (*Gymnasio Hieroglyph.* p. 97), that some have both kinds of diameter on the same coin. But we exceedingly doubt the validity of any argument drawn from Hebrew coins, as we have not been able to obtain a sight of one which did not at once appear manifestly spurious; and an intelligent London collector, in conversation with us, said that he had never seen a genuine one; and thought, moreover, that a coin called Shekel never existed, but that it was a denomination of weight only, like the ounce. Spanheim at first thought them all counterfeit; but in the edition 1706 he says he had since seen some which appeared genuine; yet he denies that any of those, which have the least pretensions to authenticity, are of higher antiquity than the time of the Maccabees, and says, the character they bear is that used in civil affairs at that time. The letters are so little like any known character, that it is difficult to fix on their prototype; it may have been the Hebrew distorted; or they may be barbarous imitations of the barbarous Samaritan. Most of them are gross counterfeits: many give Moses the ram's horn, and some have the Vulgate blunder, "*cornuta esset facies!!!*" Yet this very argument from coins has been that most confidently relied on for inferring the superior antiquity of the Samaritan character! (Capellus, p. 38.)—We have only hastily gone over a small portion of this very extensive branch of the inquiry; and should not have touched upon it at all, but that we are quite convinced of the fallacy of the common opinions on this subject; and it is satisfactory to be assured that the Scriptures we now possess are identical in form, as well as in substance, with those books dictated by the Holy Spirit. But, though very satisfactory to know this, it is not a question of vital importance; for we know most assuredly that the Hebrew Scriptures were written in their present form in the time of our Lord; and, being stamped with His sanction, they have to us, who are Christians, all the weight of Divine authority.

Next to the perfection of the character itself, we are disposed to place the Masoretic punctuation, as presenting an effectual barrier against the corruption of the Hebrew text. We believe the points and accents to be as old as the time of Ezra, if not an integral part of the language from the beginning. But we are content to wave this discussion, and only to assume, what no sane man can deny, and what Capellus and Brian Walton fully conceded, namely, that the points do every where define and fix the true sense of Scripture, and that without them we should probably have lost the knowledge of Hebrew in the miseries and ignorance of the dark ages.

The Hebrew points and accents mutually depend on each other, and cannot be separated. The connection of the sentence and the regimen of the words fix the accents, and the position of these determines the vowel points of each word; for the same word is pointed differently when governed by different accents. Thus the sense of the whole passage operates as a check upon each letter in the sentence, and becomes a great safeguard against corruption or loss. We know of noting elsewhere at all comparable with the perfection of this system of punctuation. The accents in Greek, and many modern languages, affect only those syllables to which they are attached: the stops in common use only shew the pauses and divisions of sentences: but the Hebrew accents not only regulate the euphony, and divide the members of a paragraph; they have also a power of which no adequate idea can be formed from any European language. The order in which words are placed seldom indicates with certainty the exact relation of the ideas to be conveyed: this can be done by tone of voice in speaking, and is done by the Hebrew accents. These sustain and carry on the sense from a leading accent to one which is governed by it, so as to represent to the eye the whole train of ideas; forming a system for the transmission of thought absolutely perfect, in our estimation; the surpassing beauty of which has often led us to wonder that this part of the Hebrew language has been so little studied by the moderns. The manuscripts now used publicly in the synagogues are without points, but they have always a pointed one at hand to refer to. Those manuscripts intended to be pointed, are first written without, and the

points are generally added by another hand. This probably arose from the necessity of using, in large manuscripts, a kind of pen and ink for the letters different from those necessary for the points. The letters were written with a broad-pointed pen, made of cane or reed, and having a slanting nib; the ink also was of a very thick consistency: but the points require a fine pen with an equal nib, and probably of quill: they need, too, thinner ink. From these circumstances the points have changed colour sometimes, more or less than the letters; and these appearances have led to the inference that the points have been added in a later age;—an inference, by the bye, which gives nothing whatever to the anti-punctists, since no one can have the folly to maintain that any of these manuscripts reach in antiquity to the very latest period ever given to the Masoretes.

The perfection of the Hebrew character was well sustained by the exceeding great care taken in appointing well-qualified scribes, and in subjecting all the materials employed, and afterwards the finished work, to the most strict examination. The skins, pens, and ink, must all be prepared by an Israelite, for that express purpose; and if any of these precautions were neglected, the manuscript was vitiated, and must be destroyed. The finished copy must be examined within thirty days; and if three errors were discovered in any skin, it was rejected. Thus every expedient was adopted to check and exclude the errors of transcription.—But a question arises, Whether the Jews, in their aversion to Christianity, have perverted the text? Such a charge has been brought against them by the Papists, and by the ultra-Hutchinsonians. We not only acquit them of the imputation, but maintain, that, supposing them to have had such a design, it is impossible they could have effected it. Before Christ, they had no such temptation; and we know that they did not, for St. Paul names, as the great privilege of his people, "chiefly that unto them were committed the oracles of God" (Rom. iu. 2). After the time of our Lord they could not, for the Apostles, and most of the first Christians, knew the Hebrew Scriptures. And among the Jews themselves, scattered as they then were in all parts of the earth, (if it should be thought credible that they could combine to falsify all their manuscripts at the same time, and in the same respects,) their own Masora Paraphrases and Cabala opposed insuperable obstacles. But Origen, Jerome, and Eusebius, all acquit the Jews of this charge; and Jerome's own version and comments clearly prove that all the strong-holds of Christianity remain the same in our present Hebrew text as in that which Jerome used.

Before the invention of parchment, they wrote on prepared skins, like the "ram's skins" (Exod. xxxvi. 19) with which the tabernacle was covered. These were either brown, and written with ink, like the African manuscripts of the present time; or purple, and written in letters of gold, like that from which, according to Josephus, the version of the LXX. was made. The skins generally contained three pages; each page from twelve to eighteen inches long, and from four to six inches broad. They were sewed together, making one long strip; which being fixed to two rollers, one at each end, they unrolled it from the one and rolled it on to the other, according to the part of the volume which they had occasion to read. Such manuscripts were less liable to injury from damp or change of temperature than those written on parchment, or any other material; and they were written with so full a body of ink, that the character retains its distinctness for centuries, and would bear repeated washings. These noble volumes have a grandeur and dignity in their appearance worthy of the sacred books.

Some of them are fifty yards long, and written in characters so large and distinct, that he must be a very careless reader who should mistake or confound them. But, notwithstanding this distinctness, together with the great care of the Jews in transcribing the Scriptures, it is certain that mistakes do occur in the very best of the manuscripts; and these corruptions, or losses, it is the main business of Biblical criticism to rectify and restore. These maculae do not at all invalidate the Divine authority of the Scriptures, which fully testify of Jesus, and contain the words of everlasting life. But when the Word, to whom they testify, "became flesh and dwelt among us," the book was thenceforward left in the keeping of man; and so, with all possible care on his part, could not but suffer that loss incident to every thing which has frail man for its guardian. Had the Scriptures, retained in every minute particular their original perfection, such a phenomenon must have been regarded as miraculous, and the soundest mind could scarcely escape feeling a superstitious reverence, bordering on idolatry; while

to the bulk of mankind they would really have become an idol of the grossest kind; for they would regard the book as Divine, while every letter proved its human origin. Now it is as a treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, not of men.

Before the light of Prophecy was extinguished in the church, and before the Jews could be even suspected of perverting the text of Scripture, the providence of God appointed means by which we are now able to assure ourselves that the Hebrew text is not corrupted: First, in the Greek translation of the LXX., confirmed as it is by its agreement with those passages quoted from the Old Testament by our Lord and the Apostles: secondly, by still confiding the care of the Hebrew Scriptures to Jews, opponents of the Gospel; while the Christian church with the same jealous and rival fidelity preserved the Greek Scriptures. After the time of the Apostles, for nearly a thousand years, the Hebrew language was almost unknown to the church. Only two of the fathers, Origen and Jerome, made use of it for interpreting Scripture; and they had not taken up the study till late in life, and are not to be considered as masters of the language. The knowledge of Hebrew was then retained only by the Jews, and even among them mainly by their Talmudical and Cabalistic propensities. These mysterious and often puerile discussions were overruled, in the providence of God, to the safe keeping of his revelation: an end which was more completely attained by the talismanic power they attached to particular positions and combinations of letters, checked as it was by the laborious enumerations of the Masorettes, and the calculations founded thereon, than it could have been by any more rational devices, in those ignorant ages. Moreover, these men were so intent on the supposed mystery which every letter of the Bible involved, that the idea of corrupting the text they would start from as a sacrilege which might provoke instant judgment; and even if they had attempted such a crime, the cross ligatures of these intricate combinations, which fixed every letter to its own place, rendered the crime impracticable. It is clear, from Philo-Jutheus and parts of Josephus (to say nothing of Sohar, Bahir, or Jetzirah), that the Cabalistic dogmas are of very early date; the Talmudists and Paraphrasts begin as early: and if any one should suspect the Jews of desiring to corrupt the text of the Hebrew Scriptures, let him consider this argument, derived from their own Talmuds and Cabala, and he will immediately perceive the utter hopelessness of such an attempt. The pursuits of these men remind us of the alchemists, who, vainly pursuing an imaginary good, conferred unintentionally far more important benefits upon mankind. The Cabalistic writings, too, have much that is analogous with the philosophy of Plato; with a dim shadowing forth of incomprehensible mysteries, which, stripped of their puerilities, shew profundity and sublimity beyond any other speculations. It was this which struck on the ardent mind of Picus of Mirandula, and through him became the principal cause of the revival of Hebrew learning in Christendom. From him, Peter Gelatine and Reuchlin caught their ardour; but they also gave their chief study to Cabalistic lore. Reuchlin, however, published his Hebrew Grammar and Lexicon; and, the way being then opened, Pagninus, Munster, Brixianus, the Buxtorfs, Castell, and a thousand more, succeeded; who left no region of Oriental literature unexplored, and largely contributed to the brilliancy of that blaze of light which the church enjoyed in that Augustan age of theology, during which she accumulated a treasure of learning which her sons of the succeeding ages have been too indolently contented to draw upon, without sufficiently exerting themselves to add fresh stores to the common stock. But a more generous and independent spirit seems now to animate them, and may God bless and increase it!

The Greek text of the New Testament would at first sight appear to have been less carefully guarded from corruption than the Hebrew text of the Old. For in the Christian church there existed no prohibition against transcribing the Scriptures, nor was there any prescribed rule or imperative necessity for examining the finished manuscript. Clearness of writing was more regarded than competency of knowledge; and some of the earliest manuscripts remaining—the Alexandrine, for instance— were written by women indifferently acquainted with the language, and owe their preservation to the little use which was made of them. But the copies of the New Testament were so very numerous, the comments of the Fathers so copious and minute, the versions began so early, and the great doctrines were so interlaced into whole chapters and epistles, by the many controversies with heretics and the many councils assembled on their account, that we are able, by these multiplied

checks on error, and these numerous avenues to truth, as certainly to fix the true meaning of the New-Testament Scriptures as that of the Old. The best editions of the Hebrew Bible, are — 1. Athias and Leusden, 1667; from which the Jews generally now write their rolls for the synagogue. 2. Jablonski, 1699; the most beautiful, and, as we think, the most accurate of all the editions. 3. Vanderhooght, 1705; which is most generally esteemed, and is a very fine edition. 4. David Nunes Torres, 1700, 4 vols. 12mo, an edition much esteemed by the Jews. But to the theological student, that of Michaelis, 1720, is by far the most useful Hebrew Bible: its text is among the most correct, and its marginal references and notes are incomparably valuable. Correct editions of the Greek Testament abound every where, and are too numerous to specify. All the editions of Stephens are carefully printed. Mill, in the edition of 1707, rendered important service to the church, in his extensive collection of various readings Bengel, Wetstein, Griesbach, and many more, have followed in the same course; and, though it is still going on, we think little more remains to be done, all the principal stores of information having been now thoroughly examined.

In discussing the merits of the several translations from the Hebrew Scriptures, we give the first place, for importance as well as for age, to the venerable Septuagint. In disputed passages of the sacred text, this version affords more light than all the others put together; and if we now possessed it in the original state, we should probably need no other help in interpretation: but not having been confided to guardians so vigilant as the Jews, it became sadly corrupted before the time of Origen, as his notes prove. It is not to our present purpose to enter upon the history of this version, nor to inquire whether ours is that of the age of Ptolotuy: we know it to be the same which Origen thought the LXX., excepting the book of Daniel, which is Theodotion's. In the time of Origen, this was the version commonly used by the church; but in transcription it had grown corrupt; and he corrected it from the best manuscripts, and it formed one of the columns in his Tetrapla. He inserted it also in his Hexapla, which consisted of—I. the Hebrew text; 2. the Hebrew words written in Greek characters; 3. the version of the LXX.; 4. the version of Aquila; 5. the version of Theodotion; 6. the version of Synuachus—arranged in six parallel columns. Of all these, excepting the LXX., fragments only remain; which were collected first by Drusius, afterwards more diligently by Montfaucon. Aquila's version was ploddingly literal, and regarded rather as a mere lexicon of word for word, than a transfusion of the meaning of the original. Theodotion and Symmachus, on the other hand, were too paraphrastic, and both of them Ebionites. Jerome speaks of two classes of the LXX.; one, the common sort, and very incorrect; the other, from Origen's Hexapla, which he followed. But the Greek versions at that time were very numerous; and of the Latin, he says, there were almost as many versions as there were copies. Jerome, therefore, undertook to reform the Latin version; and the ultimate result of his labours was the Vulgate, which has ever since been the authorized version of the Roman Church. Jerome, considering the time, was well fitted for the work he had undertaken; and he omitted no pains which might increase his qualifications: four several times does he record his having recourse to Jews, to perfect himself in the Hebrew: and he seems to have pursued his object indefatigably, and with the ardour of one who loved his work; and though we hold in true Protestant abhorrence the several Popish inferences which have been drawn from Jerome's blunders, we still dare to be just, and pronounce the Vulgate version to have been a noble work. His blunders were those of honest ignorance, not of systematic perversion; and, being honest, they are generally palpable, and often self-contradictory. Take it all in all, and as the work of one man, it does him much honour; nor is there any version even now which in the prophetic parts comes nearer to the sense of the original than the Vulgate does.

Jerome Origen had fixed the Greek version by his Hexapla, so e fixed the Latin version by the Vulgate, and for a thousands years it continued the standard of the Western churches. the first important innovation in this long-established prescription was made in the literal version of Santes Pagninus, 1527.

Pagnine was a good Hebrew scholar, and he spent thirty years on his translation; but he does not seem to have had an acute mind; and when his verbal knowledge of Hebrew failed him, he either gives the Vulgate rendering, or words alone, without meaning. But, still, his version assisted much iu opening

the Hebrew Scriptures; and his Lexicon, especially when improved by Mercer, still more. Arius Montanus rather increased the dry literality of Pagninus, and had not so much learning to support or excuse it.

Munster was the next, who in 1539 published a new translation from the Hebrew: it was dry, literal, and abounded in barbarisms.

The next translation of importance, was that begun by Leo Juda, completed by Bibliander and his coadjutors, and published in 1543. This, though in some places becoming a paraphrase rather than translation, is an excellent version, and was reprinted by Stephens, with notes by Vatablus, 1545.

Castalio's translation was published 1551. He, wishing to avoid the barbarous style of Munster, fell into the opposite extreme; and, by moulding the phraseology of his version after classical models, rather offended pious minds, while he failed in pleasing those of refined taste. But his work is very valuable. He generally perfectly understands the original text, and his notes are full of piety and simplicity; and where he is unable to interpret, he has the honesty to stop, and confess his ignorance. The last of the versions which we have occasion to notice, is that of Tremellius and Junius, published 1579. This translation, though now much neglected, is to the Hebrew student very important. Tremellius was a converted Jew, and well understood Hebrew, the sense of which he generally gives exactly. He thought not of style in his version, and in most cases adhered to the Hebrew idiom. He has also the sole merit of marking the distinction between the different names and appellations of God, which no other version does uniformly. For these and many other excellencies, we think it deserving of much higher estimation than it now receives.

These versions, either singly or combined, have formed the basis of nearly all the modern translations; and it might be very instructive, were this the place, to trace the doctrines of the different national churches, according to the version from which their vernacular translation of the Scriptures was chiefly deduced: for each of those Latin versions proceeded from a disciple of some particular school of theology, the peculiarities of which it could not but retain, and would transmit to those which were copied from it. With this caution impressed upon the mind should they be consulted; for a reference to them can hardly, we think, be dispensed with by any one who would satisfy himself that he understands the full verbal meaning of the original. We say verbal, and refer to the understanding only, as being but one avenue or means of approach to the spiritual meaning; which last is a much higher attainment, and one which sometimes appears the result of an instinctive tact of spiritual discernment given from above, and independent of any common means.

The state of learning in the Christian church has been to a considerable extent anticipated in our account of the several versions. The principal truths of the Old Testament having been embodied in the New, and the Greek version being in very general use, Hebrew learning very soon languished in the church; and though it was from time to time partially revived by the accession of a Jewish convert, yet it had ceased to be cultivated with any profit to the church before the time of Cotten. The encomiasts of Origen boast of the short time in which he mastered Hebrew. This only leads to the suspicion that he had by no means mastered it; and nothing in his remaining works chews any deep or critical acquaintance with the language. Of Jerome, this is not merely a suspicion, but a certainty; for his comments prove, that, with all the pains he had taken, in procuring four different Jews for instructors, his knowledge of Hebrew scarcely exceeded that of a well-taught schoolboy. But we think this has been to us rather an advantage than otherwise: for as the chief use of Jerome's works and Origen's fragments is to verify the sacred text, this is better done by the servile adherence to the letter of Scripture, which their conscious weakness imposed upon them, than by any critical acumen. On the contrary, we have rather occasion to rejoice that they were not gifted with the learning, if it had been accompanied with the recklessness of either Houbigant or Bentley, as they might then have endeavoured to model the text according to those notions of amendment which would best suit their translations; and not, as they have done, given us every where the letter, whether they could make their

own sense of it or not. Jerome died A. D. 420; and for nine hundred years we find no traces of Hebrew learning in the writings of the Western church. With the generation that succeeded Jerome, or soon after, Greek literature also declined, and the subtleties of the schoolmen took the place of theology in the church, and their barbarous Latin became its only learning: and many a precious manuscript was erased, to furnish parchment for Thomas Aquinas or P. Lombard. Had we space, it might be instructive to trace out the heresies and superstitions which have from time to time arisen, in their connection with the learning or the credulity whence they severally sprang. Heresy is dangerous and infectious only in proportion to the learning which accompanies it—if, indeed, perverted learning be not its only soil. In the Western church we find but little of heresy, after the time of Athanasius, till the revival of learning in the fifteenth century; but in the East, where a certain portion of learning subsisted, heresies springing from a perversion of learning abounded: and, monstrous as the superstitious accumulation embodied in the Papacy appears, it is less hateful than the wild, hopeless, irremediable heresies of the East. These heretical perversions have no fixity or substance with which to grapple, and rest on no principle on which you can take your stand; but superstition has generally a basis of truth, and you have only to clear away the rubbish to discover the goodly foundation on which it rests. The first symptoms of a revival of learning in the church appeared in Nic. de Lyra, 1320. He may be considered as the forerunner of the Reformation, by his knowledge of Hebrew loosening the spell of ignorance in which the church had been so long imprisoned, and by the freedom of his comments preparing the way for that perfect liberty of private interpretation which the Reformers established. Luther says of him, "Ego Lyram ideo amo, et inter optimos polio, quod ubique diligenter retinet et persequitur historiam:" and he is commonly said to have held Luther's stirrup. The miseries which now overwhelmed the East, and the persecutions in Spain, drove multitudes of learned men into Italy, bringing with them their books, their only solace. The ardent Italians immediately caught the flame, and learning at once blazed forth in all its several quarters. The principal instrument in reviving Hebrew, was Picus of Mirandula, who in 1484 astonished the world by the variety and precocity of his talents, and whose early death left his contemporaries under the full impression of the emulation he had excited, and took away the jealousies and other attendant evils. His whole career was brilliant and extraordinary, and he had taken up that branch of Hebrew learning which was most calculated to excite astonishment, and produced by it an effect on that age which probably has not its parallel. Galatine and Reuchlin were first led to Hebrew by the meteoric glare which Picus left in his track; but Reuchlin, in his zeal for the preservation of some Rabbinical books, was brought into contest with the monks: in this contest he was supported by the principal Reformers, and its circumstances contributed greatly to give notoriety and eclat to Hebrew literature. The Reformers had also now found the necessity of continually appealing to the original Scriptures, and most of them became in consequence good scholars. Bibles, grammars, and lexicons were abundantly circulated; and many a man, who never emerged from privacy, was enabled by these means to become well acquainted with the Scriptures, and in his own sphere of acquaintance to diffuse the truths of the Reformation, though his name was unknown beyond the private circle. At the beginning of the Reformation the greatest portion of learning was on the side of the Reformers: the Papists felt their disadvantage, and did their utmost to supply it, but for the first century continued decidedly inferior to the Protestants. But the cause of learning among the Protestants received a great injury in Grotius, from which it has never wholly recovered. The learning of Grotius none can deny, but he turned it to so ill an account, that, without thinking himself infidel, or being so esteemed by others, he has served the cause of infidelity perhaps more effectually than a professed infidel, and brought a discredit even on learning itself. The principles of interpretation which he first introduced still have their patrons, and keep alive in the minds of many pious simple persons an undefined and jealous dread of learning, lest it should pervert the simplicity of the Gospel. He, if not the first to begin, did by his learning give the most powerful sanction, and carried to a most pernicious extent, the reprehensible principle of accommodation in interpreting the word of God; assuming that the Scriptures do not mean what they seem to say, but that they are to be limited or exaggerated according to the interpreter's notions of propriety. Another kindred error of the same school, is the supposition that God's ordinances were framed in condescension to the follies and superstitions into which the heathen had fallen;—an error which Spencer adopted from Grotius, and carried into all the institutions of the Law. And thus, by supposed figures, and orientalisms, and

accommodations, they explain away all the definite sense of the Prophecies, and rob the Law of the better part of its Divine sanction. These errors, which now prevail on the Continent to the extent of rendering their theology nearly infidel, are to be traced to a want of the just equipoise of faith and learning. If faith be deficient, heresy, passing through all its degrees up to infidelity, is the consequence; or cast away learning, and the tendency is towards superstition: but let faith and learning be duly combined, and they then constitute the panoply of a complete theologian. "Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and, having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breast-plate of righteousness, and your feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked: and take the helmet of salvation; and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."