

PREFACE
TO
HENRY'S COMMENTARY.

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COMMENTARIES on the Bible may be conveniently divided into two kinds, the CRITICAL and PRACTICAL. The first, by a grammatical analysis of the words and phrases of the original text, endeavour to ascertain the literal meaning of each passage; and to enable others to judge of the correctness of the interpretation, the whole critical process is spread before the reader. Helps of this sort are very important to the learned, for, in all cases, the literal sense must be determined before any proper use can be made of the text, or any other interpretation founded on it. The propriety, force, and meaning of a metaphor, or an allegory, can only be known by first understanding the literal meaning of the words employed; and the same is true in regard to what may be called the mystical, or spiritual, meaning, of any passage of Scripture. But, however necessary this critical analysis may be, it can be useful to none but the learned. Commentaries of another kind, therefore, are required for common readers, who have as deep an interest involved in the truths of the Bible, as the critical scholar; and who are as much bound in duty to search the Scriptures: for as every man must give account of himself, both of his faith and practice, he must have the right to judge for himself. The best helps ought, therefore, to be provided, to enable all classes of men to form correct opinions on the all important subject of religion. For this reason, many practical expositions, not only of detached passages and single books, but of the whole Bible, have been composed, and have been extensively useful in elucidating the Scriptures; and in teaching how the truths of Revelation may be applied to regulate the hearts and direct the lives of men. In this class, HENRY'S EXPOSITION holds a distinguished place. This work has now been before the Christian community for more than a hundred years, and has, from its first publication, been so well received, and is so generally approved, that all recommendation of the work itself seems to be now superfluous. It has, indeed, become a standard work in theology; not with the people of one denomination only, but with the friends of sound piety and evangelical religion, of every name. Many other valuable commentaries, it is true, have been given to the public since this work was first edited, and have deservedly gained for themselves a high estimation and extensive circulation. But it may be safely said, that Henry's Exposition of the Bible has not been superseded

by any of these publications; and in those points in which its peculiar excellence consists, remains unrivalled. For some particular purposes, and in some particular respects, other Commentaries may be preferable; but, taking it as a whole, and as adapted to every class of readers, this Commentary may be said to combine more excellencies than any work of the kind which was ever written, in any language. And this is not the opinion of one, or a few persons, but thousands of judicious theologians have been of the same mind; and it may be predicted, that as long as the English language shall remain unchanged, Henry's Exposition will be highly appreciated by the lovers of true religion.

Our object in this Preface is, to endeavour to point out some of the more distinguishing characteristics of this great work, and to offer some motives to induce Christians of our country to study it. Before I proceed farther, however, I would remark, that the principal excellence of this Exposition does not consist in solving difficulties which may be found in Scripture. On this ground, complaint is sometimes heard from those who consult this Commentary, that they may obtain light on obscure and perplexed passages, of being disappointed in their expectations; and that, while plain passages are largely expounded, those which are difficult are briefly touched, or passed over without notice. To this objection it may be answered, that to exhibit the use and application of those parts of Scripture which are not involved in difficulty, is far more important for practical purposes, than the elucidation of obscure passages. It is a general, and surely it is a comfortable fact, that those parts of Scripture which are most obscure are least important. But the same objection might be made, and indeed has been made, to all Commentaries, that they leave the difficult texts as obscure as they found them; from which the only legitimate inference is, that, in regard to a large portion of texts of difficult interpretation, the learned and unlearned stand very much on the same level; yet, doubtless, much light has been shed on many things in the Scriptures, by the labours of the learned. And although we do not claim for this Commentator the highest place among Biblical critics, yet we have a right to say, that HENRY was a sound and ripe scholar; and especially, is said by his biographers to have been an excellent Hebrew scholar. We are not to suppose, because no parade of critical learning is exhibited in these volumes, that the Author did not critically examine every text. As the Orator is said to practise the art of eloquence most perfectly, when all appearance of art is concealed; so we may say, that he makes the best use of the critical art in the instruction of the people, who furnishes them with the results, without bringing at all into view the learned process by which they were arrived at. One fact is certain from internal evidence, that Mr. Henry wrote his Commentary on the Old and New Testaments, with the learned compilation of Pool, called *Criticorum Synopsis*, open before him; as, in all difficult passages, he has judiciously selected that opinion from the many presented in this work, which, upon the whole, seems to be most probable.

But, while we contend that our Author is a sound and ingenious Expositor, as it

relates to the literal interpretation of Scripture; yet we do not find his claim to pre-eminence on his critical acumen, or profound erudition, but on qualities which shall now be distinctly brought into view.

1. To begin, then, with the style of this work, I would remark, that two qualities, not often united, are here combined, *perspicuity* and *conciseness*. That the style is perspicuous needs no other proof than the examination of any page of the Exposition. And when I attribute perspicuity to this composition, I use the word in direct reference to the capacity and apprehension of the unlearned reader. A style chiefly formed of words of a foreign origin, may be as perspicuous to a learned man as any other; but not so to the common reader, who is only familiar with that kind of language which is commonly used in conversation. For the most part, Mr. Henry's style is made up of pure old English words, and therefore it is plain to every class of people; and is also familiar, because the words are the same as those all are accustomed to hear every day.

But it will not be so readily granted that the style is concise. The number and size of the volumes seem to lead to a different conclusion. And, indeed, when we see six folio volumes, written by one hand, the presumption is very natural and strong, that he must be a diffuse writer. This, however, in regard to our Expositor, is not the fact. There are few books, in the English language, written in a more concise, sententious style, than Henry's Exposition. On examination, very few expletives will be found. Every word speaks, and every sentence is pregnant with meaning; so that I do not know how the book could be abridged in any other way than by leaving out a part of its contents. And we must distinguish between a long discourse and one which is diffuse: a short work may be very diffuse, while one of great length may not have a superfluous word.

2. Another quality of the style of this Commentary is *vivacity*. This word does not exactly express the idea which I wish to convey, but it comes as near it as any one I can think of at present. I mean that pleasant turn of thought, in which we meet with unexpected associations of ideas, expressed in that concise and pointed form which, on other subjects, would be termed wit. Indeed, if I were permitted to invent a phrase to indicate the quality of which I am now speaking, I would call it *spiritual wit*. It has, by some, been called a cheerful style; and certainly, the reading of this work has a tendency not only to keep the attention awake, but to diffuse a cheerful emotion through the soul. He must be a very bad man who would become gloomy by the perusal of Henry's Commentary. Now, I need not say how important this quality is in a composition of such extent. Without it, however excellent the matter, weariness would take hold of the reader a thousand times before he had finished the work. This seems to have been the natural turn and complexion of the pious author's thoughts. There is no affectation; no unnatural comparisons, or strained antitheses. It is true, there is an approach to what is called *quaintness*, and a frequent play on words and phrases of similar sound, but different meaning; but, although these things are not conformable to the standard of modern taste, yet they are very agreeable to the great mass

of the people, and give such a zest in the perusal of the work, that we can scarcely allow ourselves to indulge a wish, that the style were in any respect different from what it is.

3. But a characteristic of this Exposition of a more important kind than any that have been mentioned is, the *fertility* and *variety* of good sentiment, manifest throughout the work. The mind of the author seems not only to have been imbued with excellent spiritual ideas, but to have teemed with them. It is comparable to a perennial fountain, which continually sends forth streams of living water. In deriving rich instruction and consolation from the sacred oracles, adapted to all the various conditions and characters of men, the author displays a fecundity of thought, and an ingenuity in making the application of divine truth, which strikes us with admiration. The resources of most men would have been exhausted in expounding a few books of the Bible; after which little more could have been expected, than common-place matter, or the continual recurrence of the same ideas: but the riches of our Expositor's mind seem to have been inexhaustible. He comes to every successive portion of the sacred Scriptures with a fulness and freshness of matter, and with a variety in his remarks, which while it instructs, at the same time refreshes us. Even in his exposition of those books which are very similar in their contents, as the gospels for example, we still find a pleasing variety in the notes of the commentator. It is difficult to conceive how one man should have been able to accomplish such a work, without any falling off in the style of execution.

It is true, indeed, that Mr. Henry did not live to put a finishing hand to the exposition. He had made ample preparations for the completion of the work, but while it was in the press, to the regret of all good men, he was called away from the field of labour. But the providence of God, though mysterious, is always wise. It should be matter of lively gratitude, that this eminent servant of God was permitted to remain so long in our world, and to accomplish so much for the edification of the church, not only in his own, but in all future ages. The commentary was completed by the author, as far as to the end of **THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES**: the remaining books were expounded by certain of his friends, who were eminent for their theological knowledge and piety; and who, doubtless, availed themselves of the assistance of his papers, in executing the work, which they respectively undertook. Their names are prefixed to the books on which they severally wrote the commentary; and although the reader will be sensible of the want of Mr. Henry's peculiar vivacity and happy turn of thought; yet he will find the continuation of the Exposition executed in an able and judicious manner; and with as near an approximation to the author's inimitable style, as could be expected from other hands.

4. There is perhaps no one thing which gives a more distinctive character to this performance, than the weighty, pithy, pointed sayings, with which it abounds. Whether these apothegms were, generally, the production of the author's ingenuity, or were

collected from the common stock of English proverbs, current in his day, their value is the same to us.

The ancients appear to have understood, better than the moderns, the importance of the method of instruction by proverbs, or aphorisms. It was considered by them the highest effort of wisdom to invent proverbs, parables, or fables, which, in few words, convey much meaning. Several of those, called by way of eminence *THE WISE MEN OF GREECE*, are celebrated for no other productions, but a few sayings which met with general approbation, and which passed into proverbs. The value of a stock of good proverbs to a nation cannot easily be too highly appreciated. These are kept in constant use and circulation, and are learned by all classes of people, without effort; and become, to the vulgar, the maxims by which life is regulated. Nothing is more common, when a man's judgment has been suspended for a while, than to come to a decision, by the recollection of some proverb, or general maxim. Men are actually influenced by the knowledge which is present to their minds, at the moment when their purpose is formed, and this gives an advantage to apothegms over every other form in which useful knowledge is treasured up. While other learning is like treasure hoarded up, which cannot always be put into circulation at a moment's warning, these are comparable to the current coin of a nation, which is always ready, and always in circulation. Perhaps a man might often be as useful to his country by inventing and putting into general circulation, a few pithy, pointed, moral or prudential maxims, as by writing an elaborate work on moral science, or political economy. It is a fact worthy of notice, that the peasantry or common people in some places, carry on their conversation very much by recollecting and repeating appropriate proverbs; and such people will generally be found to be more than usually discerning and prudent. In the instruction of youth, this easy method of furnishing and fortifying their minds, ought not to be neglected. A father who instils into his children a large stock of sound, practical, moral, and prudential aphorisms, really leaves them a richer inheritance, than if he provided for them as many jewels. We have, moreover, the highest authority for this mode of instruction. *The Bible* is replete with aphorisms of the most important kind; and one whole book, written by the wisest of men, contains nothing else but proverbs. Besides, many of our Lord's instructions were delivered in this form.

One of the most useful and esteemed works of the celebrated Erasmus, is, a collection of aphorisms, from all the writings of the Greek and Roman authors; and he who should judiciously make a collection of useful English apothegms, would confer a favour on the public at large. But it has occurred to the writer, many years since, that an excellent and useful little volume of choice sayings, might be collected from Henry's Commentary alone; and if any reader of this work should take the pains to make such a collection for his own use and that of his children or friends, he would never have occasion to repent of his labour. The exuberance of our author's mind in composing such apothegms; or his diligence in collecting them, gives a peculiar stamp to his work, which distinguishes it from all other expositions; and ever will render it

valuable, as the repository of a most useful species of learning, not to be found in such abundance, any where else.

5. The next characteristic of the following Exposition, is, the felicity and frequency with which the text, at any time under consideration, is elucidated by parallel passages. If there were no more than a frequent and copious reference to such similar texts, it would not deserve particular notice as forming a distinguishing trait of this performance; for other commentators have exceeded Mr. Henry in this respect; and, indeed, a good concordance, with patient labour, is all that is requisite for the accomplishment of such a work. But in Mr. Henry's references, there is often an ingenuity which borrows light from points where it was not perceived by others to exist. By an unexpected association and comparison of different passages, while he instructs us in that knowledge of the Scriptures which is derived from *comparing spiritual things with spiritual*, he, at the same time, fills us with an agreeable surprise, at the unlooked for coincidence of points apparently remote from each other.

No one, I think, can read this commentary without being fully satisfied, that the word of God dwelt richly in the mind of its author, *in all wisdom and spiritual understanding*. Indeed, it would seem that the contents of the Bible were constantly present to his mind, not merely in the way of recollecting them, but by a deep knowledge of their meaning and various bearings; so that he was able to survey each text by the aid of the concentrated light of the whole Bible.

I need not pause to recommend this mode of interpreting Scripture; for it recommends itself to every reflecting mind, and has the authority of apostolic precept. I will only remark, that it affords a double satisfaction to the lover of truth; for while he is thus enabled to understand a particular text more clearly, he, at the same time, discovers the harmony which subsists between all the parts of divine revelation.

The only other thing which I shall mention, as characteristic of this work, is, its evangelical, spiritual, and practical cast. The truths of God are here presented simply, without being complicated with human philosophy, or encumbered with the technical distinctions of scholastic theology, or obscured by the mists of unintelligible metaphysics. Neither is the truth presented in a controversial form, but mostly, as if no controversy existed. No doubt controversy is necessary in its place, but the more it is excluded from the pulpit, and from books intended for the edification of the people at large, the more probability will there be, that the truth will produce its genuine effect.

It has been objected, that the author does not give sufficient prominence to some important truths taught in the word of God;—but, if he has given a sound exposition of those passages in which these doctrines are contained, he has allowed them the same comparative length and breadth which they occupy in the Bible; and has preserved that proportion between the different parts of divine revelation, which the Holy Ghost has established. Indeed, this course is made necessary to the expositor of the whole Bible, unless he would leave his exposition to discuss particular points of doctrine.

Besides, some truths, not more important than many others, occupy a large space in systems of polemic theology, because they have often been opposed or disputed.

No man who has written so much, and expressed so many opinions, as Mr. Henry has done in this commentary, will be likely to have the concurrence of any one thinking man, on every minute point; but it would be extremely difficult to find a book of such extent, which unites so many minds in its approbation. Men, who seem to differ considerably in doctrinal views, read this work respectively, with pleasure and edification. It is no difficult matter, indeed, to ascertain the author's theological opinions, which are freely expressed, when the exposition of Scripture requires it; but he is moderate, and cautious of giving offence to those who differ from him; and by his unceasing effort to give a practical turn to every passage, he conciliates the pious reader's mind, even while he delivers opinions which he cannot adopt.

The end at which the author aimed, and of which he never lost sight in expounding a single text, was, to make men wise unto salvation; and the whole tendency of the work is to produce spiritual wisdom, an ardent love of holiness, and a conscientious and diligent regard to all the revealed will of God, in the performance of public and private duties.*

It is an excellency, in this commentary, that the truths of Scripture are adapted, with great spiritual skill, to the various afflictions, conflicts, and temptations which are incident to the christian life. The erring will here find reproof and direction, the sluggish excitement, the timid encouragement, the mourner comfort, and the growing christian, confirmation, and increase of knowledge and assurance.

It may be more necessary for the unlearned to read such works as this, than for the learned; yet I am persuaded, that there is no man living, however learned, but might derive much practical instruction from Henry's Exposition of the Bible: and if ministers of the gospel would spend much time in perusing this work, it would manifest itself by the richness and spirituality of their sermons and lectures. The celebrated George Whitefield states, when speaking of his preparation for the work of the ministry, that he had read the whole of Henry's Exposition of the Bible, on his knees. One principal reason why young clergymen, who possess this work, derive less benefit from it than they might, is, that they are in the habit, probably, of merely consulting the work, occasionally, when they want some aid in composing a sermon, or preparing an expository lecture for their people. But the full value of this commentary will never be perceived by those who thus use it. It should be carefully read, *in course*, and with a view to personal improvement. It is a melancholy fact, that our intellect may be vigorously exercised in discovering and arranging truths of the most important and practical kind, without the least personal edification. This is one of the many snares to which preachers of the gospel are liable, and from which it results, that their hearers often derive much more benefit from their studies, than they do themselves. It would be a

* See the author's general Preface, prefixed to the 1st volume.

great point gained, if ministers could learn the art of studying their sermons with the *heart* as well as the *head*; and I know of few things which would more effectually tend to bring this about, than a frequent and serious perusal of Henry's Commentary; especially if fervent prayer were combined with the reading.

But after all that I have said, with the view of exhibiting the characteristics of this work, I am sensible that such general description can, at best, afford but inadequate ideas of the spirit and style of an author, so peculiar in his manner. There is in good writing, as in the human countenance, an expression, which mere words cannot depict. There is a penetrating savour,—a diffusive spirit, which takes hold of the feelings of the reader, and for the time, assimilates his emotions and sentiments to those of the writer. To understand how this effect is produced by the tones of the living voice, accompanied with the animated expression of the countenance of a public speaker, is not so difficult; but to explain how the composition of one, long since dead, should still retain that penetrating, spirit-stirring energy, which we find in the writings of men, whose hearts were warm with holy affections, is not easy. The fact, however, is certain; we experience the salutary effect, when we peruse their works. In reading for edification, therefore, it is of much greater utility to apply ourselves to the writings of men, who, while they wrote, felt the sacred flame of divine love glowing in their breasts, than to such as excel in mere intellectual vigour, or in elegance of style.

My principal object in this preface is, to persuade those who may take the trouble to read it, to enter seriously and resolutely on the perusal of the following work. Whatever other books of this kind may be possessed, still Henry's Exposition will prove a treasure to any family, if it be diligently studied; without which no book can be useful.

Hitherto, this commentary has not been in general use in this country, because copies were not abundant; and the price of the work placed it beyond the reach of many, who would have been much pleased to possess it: but now, when a cheap, handsome American edition is issuing from the press, there is the best reason to hope, that it will be widely circulated and extensively read. It is worthy of notice, also, that the work is now presented to the public, not only in a very clear type, but also in a portable and convenient form. Many persons, who have not much leisure for reading, are intimidated at the sight of folio volumes; and to every one their use is inconvenient. But I am still apprehensive, that the number and bulk of the volumes, will be a formidable obstacle to many. They will be apt to think, that they have neither time nor patience to finish such a task, and therefore will be disposed to decline the undertaking. But such persons ought to reflect, that it will not be necessary to read the whole, to obtain the benefit of a part; a single book perused with care, will not be without its advantage. There is no solid reason, however, for those persons, who sincerely wish to study the Scriptures, to be discouraged by the extent of the work: for, although viewed in mass, it may seem to be an almost endless labour to those who can devote but little time to reading; yet, if any one would form a simple calculation, he would find, that the task can be accomplished with ease, in a very reasonable time.

Let us suppose, that only one half hour be appropriated to the perusal of this commentary in each of the days of the week, except the Lord's day, on which two hours might be conveniently spent in this exercise; and at this moderate rate of progress, the whole work would be finished in less than three years.

But although we have spoken of this undertaking as a "labour" and "a task," yet we are confident, that to the reader who thirsts for an increase of divine knowledge, it would be found, on experiment, to be a very precious privilege. Such a person would experience so much pleasure in the contemplation of scriptural truth, as here exhibited, and would find his mind so enriched with spiritual thoughts, that he would contract a lively relish for the exercise, and would be drawn to his work, when the season of performing it occurred, with something of the same strength of appetite, as that which urges him to partake of his daily food; and would feel the privation as sensibly when debarred from it, as when prevented from taking his usual bodily repast. Citizens, who have been long accustomed to spend an hour, in the morning, in reading the news of the day, when, by any circumstance, this gratification is abstracted from them, appear really to feel as much uneasiness, as if prevented from breaking their fast. And why may not a spiritual taste become as lively, as that which is experienced for the contents of a newspaper? Why may we not enjoy the contemplation of divine things with as strong a zest, as knowledge of another kind? Surely nothing is wanting to produce this effect, but a right disposition in ourselves. And the person who thus contracts a taste for the contents of these volumes, will find means for redeeming more time for reading than we have specified; so that the work, for which we have allowed three years, would, by many, be completed in one. And this exposition is not a composition of that kind, which when once read, leaves no desire for a second perusal, but the spiritual reader will be led to mark many passages for a reperusal; not because they were not understood at first, but because they afforded him so much delight, or communicated such seasonable instruction, that he desires to come again and again to the fountain, that he may be refreshed and strengthened.

But while we wish to raise in the minds of our readers a high estimation of the value of Henry's Commentary, we would not dismiss the subject without observing, that whatever lustre the work possesses, it is all borrowed. The light with which it shines is reflected light. The whole value of this or any other similar work, consists merely in holding up clearly and distinctly, the truth which is contained in the sacred records. And whatever of spiritual wisdom, or of the savour of piety, is found in these pages, was all derived from the influence of that Holy Spirit, who inspired the prophets and apostles to write the Scriptures, and who still bestows grace and spiritual endowments on his chosen servants, by which they are qualified, to preach and write, in such a manner, as to promote the edification of his church. In every age, God raises up men for the defence of the gospel, and also for the exposition of his word; and some of these are honoured not only with usefulness while they live, but with more abundant and extensive usefulness after their decease; so that being dead they still speak. It is impos-

sible to calculate how much good has been, and will still be effected by the pious labours of such men as HENRY and SCOTT. Their works will be read in regions so remote and obscure, that they never came to the knowledge of the pious writers. They will be read in the distant islands of the Pacific, and in the central regions of Africa, as well as in the most retired recesses of our own country. What an encouragement is this for men, who have the ability, to labour indefatigably in the communication and diffusion of divine truth? Of books we have a superabundance, but of books of the proper kind, we have not half enough. Copies of works of undisputed excellence ought to be multiplied, until all who can read are supplied with the precious treasure.

But let God have the glory of every invention, of every gift, and of every work, by which the progress and diffusion of truth are promoted or facilitated; and let all that is said in praise of men, be so spoken, as to redound to the honour and glory of the Triune God!—*Amen.*