understood it of a *new birth in mature life*.  
**Born anew or afresh** is a better rendering  
than ‘*born again*,’ being closer to the  
meaning of the Greek word, ‘from the very  
beginning;’ —‘unless a man begin his life  
anew altogether (see Gal. iv. 9), he cannot’  
&e.

It is not impossible that the other  
meaning may lie *beneath this*,—as the *kingdom* is **of God**, and so must the birth be;—  
but Grotius has made the important remark,  
that in the language in which our Lord  
probably spoke, there is no word of double  
meaning corresponding to the Greek word  
here:—so that He must have expressed it, as  
Nicodemus understood it, of an *entirely new  
birth*.

**4.]** It is impossible that Nicodemus can have so entirely and stupidly  
misunderstood our Lord’s words, as his  
question here would seem to imply. The  
idea of new birth was by no means alien  
from the Rabbinical views. They described  
a proselyte when baptized as “like an infant just born.” Lightfoot. I agree with  
Stier in thinking that there was something of the spirit that *would not* understand, and the disposition to turn to ridicule what he heard. But together with  
this there was also considerable *real ignorance*. ‘The proselyte might be regarded  
as born again, when he became one of the  
seed of Abraham: this figure would be  
easily explained on the Judaical view : but  
that *every* man should need this, was  
beyond Nicodemus’s comprehension. He  
therefore rebuts the assertion with a reduction to an absurdity, which in spirit  
expresses, as in ch. vi. 60,—‘ This saying is hard; who can hear it?”

**when he is old**: probably he himself was  
old, and he instances his own case.

**5.]** Our Lord passes by the question of  
Nicodemus without notice, further than  
that this His second assertion takes as it  
were the ground from under it, by explaining the token and means of the new birth.

There can be no doubt, on any  
honest interpretation of the words, that  
**to be born of water** refers to the token or  
outward sign of baptism,—**to be born of  
the Spirit** to the thing signified, or inward  
grace of the Holy Spirit. All attempts  
to get rid of *these two plain facts* have  
sprung from doctrinal prejudices, by which  
the views of expositors have been warped.  
Such we have in Calvin: who explains the  
words to mean, “the Spirit, who cleanses  
us, and by diffusing His influence in us  
inspires the vigour of heavenly life:’—  
Grotius, “the Spirit, who cleanses like  
water;”—Cocceius, “the grace of God,  
washing away our uncleanness and sins;”  
—Tholuck, who holds that not Baptism  
itself, but only its *idea*, that of *cleansing*,  
is referred to ;—and others, who endeavour  
to resolve **water and the Spirit** into a  
figure, so as to make it mean ‘*the cleansing  
or purifying Spirit*.’ All the better and  
deeper expositors have recognized the coexistence of the two, *water* and the *Spirit*.

This being then recognized, to what  
does **water** refer? At that time, two  
kinds of baptism were known: that of the  
*proselytes*, by which they were received  
into Judaism,—and that of John, by which,  
as a preparatory rite, symbolizing repentance, the people were made ready for Him  
who was to baptize them with the Holy  
Ghost. But both these were significant of  
*one and the same truth*; that, namely, of  
the *entire cleansing of the man* for the  
new and spiritual life on which he was to  
enter, symbolized by water cleansing the  
outward person. Both were appointed  
means,—the one by the Jewish Church,—.  
the other, stamping that first with approval, by God Himself,—towards their  
respective ends. John himself declared  
his baptism to be *incomplete*,—it was *only  
with water*; One was coming, who should  
baptize *with the Holy Ghost. That declaration of his is the key to the understanding of this verse.* Baptism, *complete, with water* and the *Spirit*, is the  
admission into the kingdom of God. Those  
who have received *the outward sign and  
the spiritual grace*, have entered into that  
Kingdom. And this entrance was fully  
ministered to the disciples when the Spirit  
descended on them on the day of Pentecost. So that, as spoken to Nicodemus,  
these words referred him to the baptism  
of John, which probably (see Luke vii. 30)  
he had slighted. But they were *not only*spoken to him. The words of our Lord  
have in them life and meaning for all ages  
of His Church: and more especially these