

beside their successors,—the Westcotts, Lightfoots, Ellicotts, Jamiesons, and others,—we see that we have travelled a long way since those days. And if we could analyse these works, and still better, if we could enter the workshops of the writers and notice the models they follow and the tools they use, we should find in the front rank and in constant use German exegetes of all schools, not merely those which exist in translations, but many more which do not.

Another and still more valuable result in the same field is the rise of a new school of English exposition, which promises in course of time to rank with the German. The standard of Hebrew scholarship is higher in Great Britain and America than it ever was. Other causes may have helped, but there can be no doubt that our leaders in this field have been fired by the example of continental scholars, as they have worked in their spirit and been profited by their labours. It is quite a common thing nowadays to find German reviews speaking with respect, almost envy, of British scholarship, a thing unknown a short time ago. There is an accuracy and exactness about our knowledge of the Scriptures which was unattainable before. As another evidence of progress in a related sphere, I may mention the six massive

volumes of Smith's *Dictionary of Christian Biography and Antiquities*, the Biography covering only the first eight centuries, a monumental work which would do honour to any age. A few of the articles are by continental writers, but the majority are the work of English hands, and are astonishingly full and accurate.

One effect of the great stimulus given to the study of Scripture is increased attention to Biblical, as distinct from Dogmatic, Theology. By Biblical Theology, we understand not only the systematising of Scripture teaching, but also the doctrines which arise directly out of Scripture. This is a subject which has long been a separate one in Germany. Witness the excellent volume by Schmid on New Testament Theology, and the more elaborate work by Weiss. Not much has yet been done in this country, though there are signs of a beginning. Bruce's *Kingdom of God* is a specimen of the kind of work referred to. The enormous amount of study given to the study of Scripture must in time bear fruit in this form. The analysis of the direct teaching of Scripture is a fascinating field in which much waits to be done. The growth of revelation, the different types of inspired teaching, the unity of the final result, all need to be brought out.

Gifts in Sleep.

A SERMON TO CHILDREN.

BY THE LATE REV. PROFESSOR W. GRAY ELSMLIE, D.D.¹

“Except the Lord work for you, it is in vain for you to rise up early and sit up late, in order that you may eat the bread of toil. Why! God gives it to His beloved while they are asleep.”—Ps. cxxvii. 2 (amended translation).

If you have thought already what the meaning of these words is, I think they must have perplexed you a little. God gives presents to people that He loves when they are sound asleep. Did He ever do that to me?

I will show you what the man who wrote this psalm wanted to put into men's hearts and minds. The beginning of the psalm is plain enough. Many a house has been built beautiful and strong; and perhaps the very night before the family were to go into it a fire burned it all down. The same

with a city; the guards kept watch, but the enemy got in and the town was burned and destroyed. When people see things like that they say, “We can't prevent accidents happening; it is God that does it; it is all in God's hands.” Then the poet goes on to say something more. “You toil as hard as you can; you rise early and sit up late; and you are doing all that in order that you may get bread to eat; and do you know that in all that work of yours you cannot do without God's help? It would never get you your food if God didn't give it you. God is not asleep when you are sleeping.”

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Well, now I have got at the meaning of the text, I am going to try and illustrate it in the simplest way I can. As soon as I had got the real translation, it made me think of something that happens at Christmas time. Every child knows that before he goes to bed he hangs up his stocking; and though he has been doing nothing, but has just been sound asleep, he finds that loving hands and hearts have been busy while he slept. And children, if they think about it, must know this, that it is not Santa Claus that comes down the chimney, but every boy knows these things come from his father. And why do fathers and mothers give things to their little children while they are sound asleep? Because they love them so much. Why are Christmas presents given to little children while they are asleep? I am not at all sure that people know why they do it. One thing is to give them a surprise in the morning. The pleasantness of a present is that you do nothing for it—it is because you had not the least idea what was to happen, and that is why, when they give a toy or a book, parents put it there in the night, and the children know it is altogether their father's or mother's doing.

Everything good, one might almost say, is given like that. I wonder if children ever think what they would do without father or mother. You put on your clothes, you have a good dinner and tea, and go to bed. Where does it all come from? Just fancy one of you little girls going into a city to earn your living; how you would have to walk till your feet ached, and you would be ill-used by people that didn't like you. Just think of that. You don't think about it; it's just as if you were sound asleep all the time. Everything your parents give you, they give while you are asleep.

It is thus with a number of the best things that a father or a mother gives; all the securing of respect and obedience—no child can understand the good of that. I know of old men and women who spoke with reverence and thankfulness of their parents, and it was not the presents they gave them, but the habits of obedience they taught, that they felt most grateful to them for. As you get older you get afterwards to see what a wreck you would have made of your life if you had not been taught to deny yourself; and all *that* fathers and mothers are giving to you, children, and it is just as if you were asleep.

I have told you this about fathers and mothers that you may understand about God.

Jesus Christ spoke a parable in which He said the same thing as is said in this psalm. He said a man goes out and sows the seed, and then goes to bed and sleeps, and rises next morning, and goes on sleeping and waking and doing nothing more. What happens? The seed sprouts and springs up, the sun warms it, the showers nourish it, the grains of corn come, and then in the autumn the man finds the field full of golden grain. Who filled that man's barn with corn? Why, it was God. The man did nothing to it; he put the seed into the ground, nothing more; and so when he looked at his barn he could say—God gave it while I was asleep. The man sleeping—not working. God gives all to His beloved while they are asleep.

I think if we thought a little more, in a more rational fashion, we should see how utterly profitless our labours would be if that great God did not help us. God is the chief partner in your business, you ought to think, and you should almost put His name down in your books as a partner in the concern. The Bible means it truly. God has a right to the biggest part in your profit, because He earned it. Take a farm, take the farmer's work, and take God's work, and estimate both. Which does the largest share?

It is not only our food and our houses God gives us when we are asleep, but the better things He gives us too. When I was not thinking of it many of the sweetest friendships that have made life better and brighter have come to me—they were not sought for. Where men give themselves to be guided by God the best things come to them. I didn't plan them; they were dropped into my life somehow. When people are converted it is constantly most unexpectedly. Let me tell a pretty story that I have read in a book. A tiny little girl was given to a man, and he did not want or expect her, but she led him to God. The man was a weaver, and poor. He lived among a number of friends, and at his chapel there was a great deal of money lost belonging to the chapel. They could not bring the theft home to any one, but this man was suspected. He grew so miserable he went wandering away to a village a great distance off, and lived there all alone, and never spoke to any one. His heart had been hardened like a stone, his life was so miserable and wretched, and he grew ill. Then he became a miser; his whole heart was wrapped up in gold; every

sovereign he saved he buried in a hole under his floor near the fireside, and in the evening he would let it run through his hands and watch the glowing red light of the fire on it. Shut up thus in himself, his heart was like a prison.

One night he was out of his house, and a thief came and stole his gold. When he came back and saw the empty hole he grew quite mad, and rushed out again. While he had been away a poor woman had fallen down near the cottage and died. Her little child, feeling cold and wretched, went to the cottage, and, going in, she fell sound asleep by the fire. When the man came back, to his disordered brain it seemed as if his gold had been changed to the golden hair of the little child. Something tender came up in his heart as he saw the child asleep there; he wrapped things about it, and the end of it was that the little child stole into his heart. Women came,

and he let one of them help and teach him, and the strange thing was that he still thought his gold had been turned into a little child, and so he grew a soft-hearted, good man. It is true enough how, when the man was unconscious (asleep), God was giving him the best of gifts.

There is another story that I don't need to tell you at length. The story how our poor world was so sad-hearted with so much misery and sin, so weary of seeking good, and failing; how one night, when the great world was just worn out with its misery and toil, all at once, down from heaven into our world, God sent a little child—the little child Jesus. That baby was the world's Saviour, and through Him life has come to the earth. God gave that little child to the world while the world was fast asleep.

That is how God gives things to those He loves while they are asleep.

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