

plants. Religion is the reality of which theology is the study.' We are in the heart of the subject at once.

The next impression is made by Dr. Clarke's interest in real life. In a sense he is aware of that. He is aware, for example, that theology may be made an abstract study. Then he says a scientific terminology might be advisable. But the practical point of view is more important; both for its own sake and for the sake of the Christian people, theology, he says, should be kept as near to actual life as possible. And so, as far as possible, he uses deliberately and delightfully the simplest language.

The next impression is the effect of his arrangement. It is chosen for simplicity, it ministers to effect. (1) Man, (2) God, (3) Sin, (4) Christ, (5) The Holy Spirit and the Divine Life in Man, (6) Things to Come. Each of these great divisions is clearly subdivided, and occupies a proportionate space. Each subdivision is so natural, related to its surroundings, and so transparent in thought and

expression, that there is no missing the author's meaning.

The next impression made is by the firmness of the author's faith. It is not only, I know whom I have believed; it is also, I know what I have believed. And as he gives it to us, it carries the freshness of the present, the hope of the future. He believes it still, he will believe it more and more as he sees.

And the last impression is the absence of dogmatism. The faith is gentle, easy to be entreated. To hold firmly is not to pull tightly. He draws us with the cords of a Christian man, with the bands of Jesus' love.

Altogether the book, by being always clear and candid, is a surprise in theological literature. And it will charm any reader, as the simply expressed does charm always. If there is to be a resurrection of the doctrinal sermon, which we pray God hasten, this book will be sought on every hand. It is possible to make doctrine interesting as nothing else is interesting.

## Sermonettes on the Golden Texts.

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### I.

'Yield yourselves unto the Lord, and enter into His sanctuary.'—2 CHRON. xxx. 8.

THE words translated 'yield yourselves' mean literally, as you will see in the margin, 'give the hand,' and the phrase is used in Scripture sometimes in the sense of submission, and sometimes of fidelity; generally, perhaps, both ideas are included. Let us take it in the two senses here, for both are needful in approaching God.

First, to give the hand in token of submission. Yield is not a very attractive word in some ways. We admire the man who does not yield to adverse fortune. It is not an agreeable word from a soldier's point of view. Let us do or die, but not yield, he would say. But the soldier, too, gives the best example, in the right sense, of yielding. He won't yield to the enemy, but there is perfect submission to the will of his commander. And it has been remarked of soldiers that, when they are

Christians, they are usually thoroughgoing ones, with no half-measures or half-changes about them, but strong in the faith, and with a simple obedient life, proving themselves good soldiers too of Jesus Christ. 'What are the marching orders?' is the view they take.

When the present Emperor of Germany came to the throne, his will and Bismarck's came somewhat into collision, with the result that Bismarck had to give way and retire. 'Who can fight against the king?' said he. Yet it is evident that he yielded with an ill grace, and cherished a grudge. It is not an unwilling yielding, however, that is implied here; it is only a glad submission that will be acceptable to God,—the whole nature, every thought, brought into subjection. How gently, how hesitatingly, as it were, Christ comes to us! He will not thrust Himself upon anyone unwillingly. 'Behold a Stranger at the door, He gently knocks, has knocked before.' But if, outside the door, Christ is a patient Suppliant, inside

He will be nothing less than King. 'Yet know, nor of the terms complain, if Jesus comes, He comes to reign.'

Secondly, to give the hand means, sometimes, a pledge of fidelity. When Solomon came to the throne, all the princes and mighty men gave the hand to him in token of fidelity. At a coronation ceremony in our own land the oath the nobles take to king or queen is as follows:—'I do become thy liegeman of life and limb, and of earthly worship, and faith and love I will bear unto thee, to live and die against all manner of folks. So help me God.' Now, fidelity is a strong point, too, in our relationship to God. It is the faithful servant that gets the 'Well done' at heaven's gate. 'Oh, true and tried, so well and long!' the poet sings of an earthly attachment. Could anything finer be said of anyone as a servant of God? We have to be faithful to God in the darkness, and faithful to the light. Many things are dark to us. 'God moves in a mysterious way.' But we must trust Him where we cannot see. All is not dark, however. The heavenly vision comes in some measure to us all. Be not disobedient to it. 'Follow the gleam.'

Above all, should this spirit of submission and fidelity characterize us in entering the sanctuary. Any spirit of haughtiness, rebellion, or vainglory is most of all out of place there. And is not the sanctuary just the place where, in a special sense, God gives *His* hand too? If we give ours in token of submission and fidelity, God gives His there as a pledge that He will be true to all His great and gracious promises. 'Thy way is in the sea,' the Psalmist says, meaning that there God is afar off, obscure, incomprehensible; there His footsteps are not known. But he says also, 'Thy way is in the sanctuary.' There God is brought nigh. Love and mercy are associated with it. In the sea even His footsteps are not known, but in the sanctuary His hand is given with all His heart in it.

## II.

'God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.'—Ps. xlv. 1.

THIS is a verse, some might say, that is far beyond children. It implies a great experience, a passing through the troubled waters, a deliverance from some great danger. As well expect the birds of the air to take up such a theme as children.

Well, we could not well imagine the birds chanting this Psalm. Their life is too little, their experience too limited, for them to strike such a lofty note. We might think of them praising God for their food, for the summer day, for the leafy boughs where they make their nests; but to take up such words as these of the text, in any real and worthy sense, would require some grand experience, far beyond them, to be passed through. So with children, it might be said, let them keep by the shepherd Psalm, and such like, as more suitable to their years. A great triumphant note like this would for them have 'little meaning though the words be strong.'

That is very questionable, however. For one thing, children, even if they have not come through great experiences such as might call forth this song, can imagine them, better often than older people. Boys, as a rule, like nothing better than to read of brave deeds, such as some of the 'deeds that won the Empire.' And their thoughts sometimes take a very vivid form, as when Coleridge, as a boy, was accused of stealing, when he was simply in imagination swimming the Hellespont as he went along the street, and his hands, in their motions, had come suspiciously near the pockets of someone passing by. Or, as when a lady, since become famous, wrote on the flyleaf of her geography in her school days, 'I am now alone on the bozom of the mity Mediteranean.' So we could well understand even a child being absorbed in the story of the destruction of Sennacherib's host, or whatever called forth originally the triumphant shout of this Psalm, and singing the Psalm appreciatively in that light.

But far, far more than in that secondary sense the words may be taken up even by children. They do not apply merely to 'far-off things and battles long ago.' They describe what God has truly been to many a humble soul whose life outwardly may have been of the most uneventful kind. And not for men and women only, but for children also, the words may have a very genuine personal sense. To rule one's own spirit is better than to take a city, and needs more the Divine help. We all need, from earliest years, to flee to God for refuge. Our hearts soon begin to tell us that we are not right with God by nature. They would lead us, like Adam in the garden, to flee from God, but, as has been said, the only way to flee *from* God is to flee *to* God. And not as a

refuge only, but as our strength. Even a child may know something of this strength, for it is a strength that is strangely connected with weakness. A very present help in trouble, the Psalm says further, and though the Divine help may in one sense be needed more when the severer troubles come, yet, if our Heavenly Father condescends to be the Helper of men and women, it is not a great step further for *Him* to come down to the needs of even the very little ones.

And, moreover, is it not the best preparation for after years, to begin early to speak and sing in great terms of God? A king once got a poet to compose a poem on his victory, before, however, he had begun the battle. He was just a little too previous, as we say, for, after all, he was defeated. But you can never be too early in taking up such a note as this of the Psalm. Sing it even if it be partly on trust, and it will be found truer and truer as life goes on. Isn't it grand that we *can* sing of God in such a strain? It is only the Bible that can teach us to do so. It has got something to sing about.

### III.

'If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.'—  
I JOHN i. 9.

THAT seems very cheap and easy terms on which to get forgiveness. It is not so if you break the laws of nature. You don't escape the penalty by confession. Neither is it so if you break the laws of the land. But between the heart and God, Whose laws we have broken, His declaration is that forgiveness follows confession. It seems a great result depending upon so little, but is there anything grander or better that forgiveness *could* depend upon than confession? Would it not augur well for a boy's future if, having done something forbidden, he felt so miserable over it that he could not rest till he had told his father and asked his forgiveness? Would you not say that, by acting in that way, he was giving the promise of a good manhood? A parent might well have good hopes as to what the future of such a child would be. And could there be anything better or more helpful than to grant forgiveness to a confession of that kind? Suppose the father said, 'My boy, I am glad to hear your confession, but it would be too much to expect that I should forgive you right off. Let us say no more about it for six months,

and I'll see how you behave meanwhile.' Observe, there might be cases in which such treatment might be needed. If a boy were found out doing wrong,—found out when all the time he had been trying or wishing to conceal his fault, then he might be best dealt with in such a way. But this is a case where, instead of being found out against his will, he makes confession of his own accord, simply because he feels so miserable under the consciousness of concealed guilt. Do you not think that immediate and full forgiveness would be the most helpful and saving thing for him in the circumstances? Well, it is so with the Divine forgiveness. The way of access to the Father has been opened up through Jesus Christ, and forgiveness is granted whenever there is true confession. Not for any great thing we must do as an equivalent, not after a long delay, a time of probation, but whenever in the right spirit we can say, 'I will arise, and go to my Father.'

And not only forgiveness, but the cleansing from all unrighteousness. Yes, that will follow from a sincere and penitent confession. Along with the blessedness of forgiveness comes an inner power that leads to the cleansing of the life. The prodigal son could not possibly have lived in the father's house, after the welcome home he received, without trying to get rid of all the evil effects of his sojourn in the far country. It would take him time, no doubt, but his whole heart would wish it, and he would have every help in the home surroundings.

Do not imagine, then, that free forgiveness leads to a low life. Quite the reverse. If you think you can live as you please, seeing that forgiveness is granted on such easy terms, that you can continue in sin that grace may abound, you have not got a glimmer yet of the blessed truth implied in the Divine pardon. You may have heard of the farmer who, having some remarkable fruit in his orchard, of abnormal size and excellence, thought it would be a nice gift to send to his king. It was heartily accepted, and, to his surprise, some days afterwards a present was sent to him in return of great value. A neighbouring farmer, hearing of this piece of good fortune, thought that he would try a similar method. So, gathering together a splendid assortment of fruit and flowers, he sent them to the king, and awaited with eagerness the grand present he was to get. Next morning, however, his own gift was sent back to him,—declined with thanks.

You see, the spirit of the two men was entirely different. There was honest kindness in the one case; in the other, heartless deception, and each was treated just as he deserved. Well, let us not suppose that God can be deceived. If there be anything false in our confession, we shall deceive neither Him nor ourselves. His Spirit will not abide with us. We shall not have the sweet assent of a good conscience toward God. But, however ignorant, however fearful we may be, if there be sincerity in our confession, it will be accepted in His sight; He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

#### IV.

‘My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not.’—Prov. i. 10.

YOU are not likely to go far in the world without meeting some who will entice you to an evil way. It may be sometimes those far older than yourself; and cursed above all beings is the old sinner who tries to lead youth astray. But, as a rule, the most powerful enticements come from vicious companions of about our own age. A difference in years brings with it natural barriers, which prevent the old and the young seeing things quite in the same way. They are separated naturally, to some extent, in their views and interests and aims. Had Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas, been about the same age as Samuel, what a risk the boy might have run of being robbed of his innocence by the defiling companionship of such vile and graceless scamps! The very difference in their ages would prove of itself a safeguard. There is nothing so surely contaminating as a wicked companion, on a level with ourselves in years, and therefore having so much in common with us by nature,—the elasticity,

the eagerness of youth, the sympathies natural to early life, and the freedom of talk that comes more readily with equality in age. Nothing helps or hurts more than the companionships we form. How important, therefore, to be able to say with the Psalmist, ‘I am a companion of all them that fear Thee, and of them that keep Thy precepts.’

But what is it that makes the enticement of sinners effectual? It is because there is something in ourselves that responds to the allurements of sin. It is attractive to us, otherwise the enticement of others would come to nothing. You may want to get your dog into the water for a swim, but, if the dog has a dislike to the water, he will resist all your blandishments. He may wag his tail, and bark in a friendly way, but he takes care to keep at a safe distance. Now, the danger for us lies in that we have, or are apt to acquire, a fondness for the water. After all, the only thing sinners can do is to open the way, to show us the way, and that is what the word translated ‘entice’ literally means. When an evil way is first shown us, there is something in us that would lead us to shrink from following it, but alas! there is something too that appeals to us and would lead us on.

What should we do, then, in the circumstances? Scripture gives a very concise and emphatic answer, a rule without exception, ‘Consent thou not.’ Why? It might be enough to reply, ‘Because God says so.’ You may be sure that it is for the best and most loving of reasons that He gives so definite a command. But, further, all experience teaches that you will be certain to regret it. No one ever yet found real gold at the foot of the devil's rainbow. Even the glamour passes away in time, and you are left at last with nothing but mists and the cold night. My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not.