





LIBRARY  
OF THE  
UNIVERSITY  
OF ILLINOIS

# THE DEVOUT STUDY OF HOLY SCRIPTURE.

A Paper

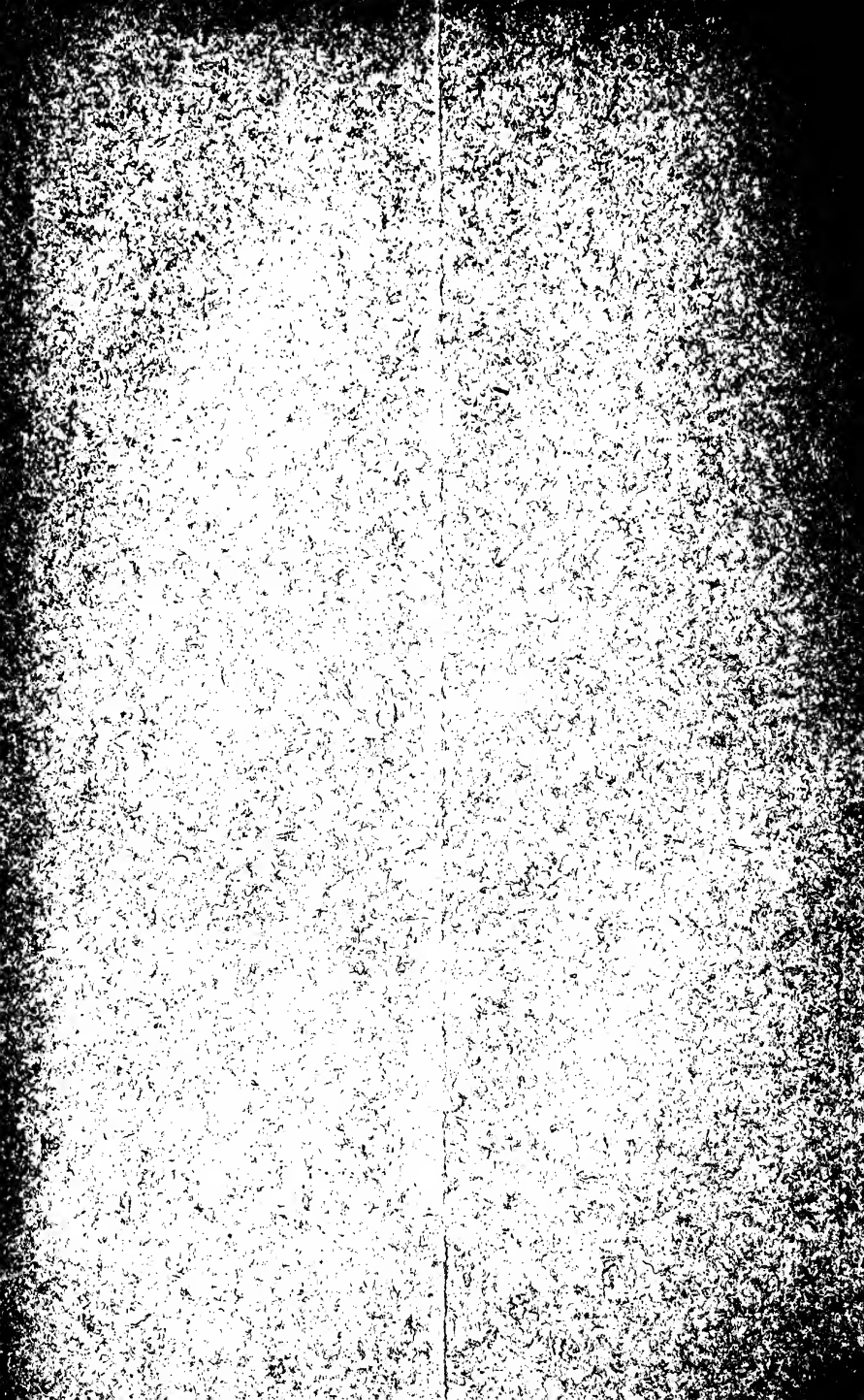
READ AT THE CHURCH CONGRESS, BRADFORD,  
SEPTEMBER, 1898.

BY THE

VERY REV. THE DEAN OF SALISBURY.

---

PRINTED BY BEMROSE & SONS, LIMITED, DERBY;  
AND 23, OLD BAILEY, LONDON.



## THE DEVOUT STUDY OF HOLY SCRIPTURE.

---

WHEN Lamennais was endeavouring to revive spiritual life in the Gallican Church, after he had spoken of the blessing of elevation of thought and distinction of character, one of his students asked, "How can we gain this?" and he answered, "Only by the old way, of constant prayer, and devout study of Scripture." Many years after these words were spoken, the counsel to read the Bible humbly, with prayer, was given in a thoughtful essay, contained in two volumes, on some of the Pauline Epistles. In days when new methods of attaining spiritual life are often recommended, and often tried, it is sometimes well to revert to first principles and the plain duties of preserving the purity and strength of one great source of spiritual life. It is possible, we know, for one who has a real and true knowledge of the Bible to neglect the devotional reading, which alone can impart the sober certainty of a true love of the higher life. To look upon the Bible as the personal possession for which account must be given, the one talent which must not be folded in a napkin or hidden in the earth, is an actual part of the believer's duty. No attendance at services, however regular, no profitable experience from personal teaching, however deep or eloquent, can compensate for the loss of the feeling which masters all emotion and ecstasy that the Bible finds us, speaks to us, and, like the eye of a portrait, seems never to lose sight of us, and sustains with an awful and majestic force a hold which can only be explained by the knowledge that the voice of God speaks inwardly to the soul, assuming the reverent attitude of humble submission. In an age of searching scrutiny into every characteristic of the collection of sacred books, ranging over more than fifteen hundred years, it is surely a duty to insist most strongly that no discovery, however startling, can in any way invalidate the need for devout study, or assail successfully the position of those who have felt, as a matter of personal experience, the internal evidence of the truth of the faith. The remembrance that there is a real unity pervading the records has only to be thoroughly embedded in the mind, and many of the differences and difficulties so often paraded to distract thought, vanish, and are as though they had never been.

When a desire to ascertain what particular lesson for the deepening of spiritual life within us a psalm or a prophecy may contain, is once encouraged, the fruitfulness of Scripture to unfold the real life of man is so felt as to extinguish all misgiving. What was called by the late Dean Stanley, in a remarkable passage in his "Sermons on the Bible," the modern element in Holy Scripture is a perpetual evidence of the power by which a character, a pregnant text, a hitherto neglected saying of our Blessed Lord's, will supply the very medicine, the healing balm, which some situation of difficulty, some wholly unexpected crisis, may require, for the softening and healing grace demanded in moments

of peril. It is only when the still hour of devout study has come that what has been called the awfulness and divinity of words is fully apprehended. We know that they are insufficient, but we know also that one work of the Comforting Spirit is to produce within us an inward sense of the Divine relations of the ever-Blessed Trinity. There is a trembling adoration, altogether unspeakable, which is the real result of devout study. There is something unspeakably awful in the recollection that in Divine communion every intellectual difference disappears; the deep thinker in his study, and the suffering sick woman who has lain on a bed for twenty years, alike find a home and rest in the approach of spirit and personal union with Him who has eternal life to grant to all who have kept His Word. When the soul turns in devout study and confession to Him who is the image of God and the light of man, all questions as to the reality of the narrative or the age of a Gospel cease to perplex or disquiet. The wonder, the suddenness of revelation, the knowledge that no reason can be given why Abraham and Moses should have taught the unity of God and the need of true morality; why Ezekiel should have proclaimed the responsibility of every soul that sinneth; why Christ should have declared that His life was given for the world, and that no man cometh unto the Father but by Him, flash upon the soul with the intense conviction that the words of life and truth are in the Bible as they are nowhere else; and that as in the life of Christ bright signs of the Godhead that dwelt within Him shone on the path of the despised, rejected One, so do manifestations of the real Prince of perfect manhood and perfect Godhead reward the strivings after more light.

A simple plan and simple rules as to the use of Scripture are generally found most enduring. The rapid reading of one book of Scripture, with a view to extract a personal lesson, has often been advocated by masters in the spiritual life. Regularity in devout study implies self-denial, and the combination of portions of the Old Testament with passages in the New has constantly conveyed a truer intelligence of inward meaning.

It may be well, too, to remember that the desire for the real intellectual enjoyment of Scripture may sometimes intercept the vision that comes from true submission and desire for progress. The analogy between the written message and the personal Word of God, striking as it is, has sometimes been pressed too far. There is no confusion in the union of humanity and Divinity in the manifestation of the Everlasting Son of God, but there may be sometimes a danger, lest in the remembrance of the human element in Scripture we should forget the intensity which makes the oracles of God reveal to the soul the inward secret which produces the abiding personal loyalty, which Dr. Pusey, in one of his latest sermons to young men, has well described as the unfailling safeguard through temptation and misbelief. We have, thanks be to God, a revelation penetrated by the peculiarities of individual minds. As a noble building approached by avenues of trees discloses its features gradually to persons advancing from different points of view, so is the character of the faith unfolded in Pauline, Johannine, and Petrine teachings shown to be one manifold, and yet absolutely true. It is the privilege of those into whose lives the devout study



of Holy Scripture has truly entered to realize the graces which come to men as citizens of the kingdom of Christ, as well as emotional fervours which express, like the breathings of Henry Martyn in the orchard shortly before his death, the highest rapture of the soul seeking union with the Saviour.

The volume of Scripture begins with the revelation that the world we know and see comes from the touch of a Creator, and in the last book of the New Testament, when the vision of the Heavenly Jerusalem fills the soul, the devout student begins to apprehend that the march of history and the volume of prophecy teach the lesson that we are to judge the message by the end which it proposes, and to acknowledge with the great Author of the Analogy that the gift of reason, like every possession of man, must yield its tribute to the Lord of Life.

One word may well be added as to the gradual revelation made to the soul, of the abiding nature of the words of Christ, the words of spirit and life, which will endure when heaven and earth pass away. There is a tendency in human nature to look upon the efforts of all who devote themselves entirely to work for Christ, at home or abroad, as a needless exaggeration of the rule prescribed in the Gospels. From a temptation to indulge in this the devout student of Holy Scripture is entirely freed. He knows that there will be in every portion of Christ's kingdom many who will feel continually that they hear a Voice men cannot hear, and see a Hand which beckons them away from the easy view of ordinary life. They know, too, that if they are not themselves called upon to sacrifice their own position and duties, deepest and truest sympathy with all who do so, issuing in interest, practical and real for all true effort, is demanded, especially in these days. The study of other religions and other faiths than that of Christ receives an unwonted impulse from constant meditation and devout study. The reproach that the Christian faith has made men sometimes too indifferent to the real progress of humanity can never be raised against those who feel that the study of Scripture has unfolded to their view the grand nature of the compassion for suffering human beings which has united men and women in generous schemes to rescue the fallen, to help the friendless, and, in a word, to better the conditions of human life. There are some, doubtless, here who have known what it is to witness the strivings and assist the doubts of some who have made shipwreck of their faith. Is it too much to say that the continuance of devout study might have saved many a noble soul from a vain regret, that the vision of Divine life once enjoyed has gone for ever? Is it too much to say that the path of safety at this time of strife might be regained if souls in earnest read psalm, and gospel, and epistle solely to discriminate between the dogma which may have something of earth in its clothing, and the vision of a personal Saviour speaking to the man within the man, and manifesting Himself as the King, the Saviour, the home of the weary and heavy laden, where light comes at eventide to all who feel that the goal of effort, the true rest for man, is hidden with Christ in God?







