

**HELPS TO DEVOUT LIVING:
CONSISTING OF SELECTIONS
FROM BIBLICAL AND VARIOUS
RELIGIOUS WRITERS OF ALL
AGES**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649601103

Helps to Devout Living: Consisting of Selections from Biblical and Various Religious Writers of All Ages by Miss J. Dewey

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MISS J. DEWEY

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COMPILED BY
MISS J. DEWEY.

NEW BEDFORD:
PUBLISHED BY THE COMPILER.
1879.

E. Anthony & Sons, Printers, New Bedford.

PREFACE.

I think that there is no religious denomination, the members of which are considerable, that has not felt the need of some kind of guidance for religious thought, and some assistance towards putting into a becoming form the petitions and acknowledgments addressed to the Supreme Being. The Psalms of the Hebrew Scriptures are themselves compositions of this character,—acts of praise or supplication, or expressions of humility and dependence upon the Source of all Good. There is no religious work, properly so called,—for I leave polemics entirely out of the question,—which does not, when read in a proper temper, awaken a desire to reach a higher standard of virtue, a more complete abnegation of self, a warmer love for our fellow creatures,—in short, a nearer resemblance in character to the founder of the Christian religion. That desire is of itself a silent prayer, to which a manual like this is intended to give a clear and distinct expression, suitable to the imperfections of our nature and to the distance at which we stand from that pattern of excellence.

That compilations not unlike this have been already made, some of which are of great excellence, is true; but this, as appears to me, does not imply that there is no room for a new one, when we consider that the materials of which it is to be composed increase with every year. As long as the human mind occupies itself with those important subjects, its relations to God and the relations of men to each other under his government,—books on religious subjects will be produced and published, and some of them will, of course, be the work of minds finely endowed by nature and cultivated and invigorated by study and reflection. These writings, whether they are of the hortatory or meditative class, whether they take the form of prayer or precept, or that of hymns expressive of some religious emotion or religious truth, supply ample mat-

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ter to be incorporated into a selection which shall form a daily companion for the devotions of the closet or the family, and which, by referring to the authors, remind us of the sympathies by which we are connected with all those of our generation who hold to the Christian faith. Distant as they may be from us in space, we bring them into communion with ourselves by adopting their words. It is hardly extravagant to say that, in this manner, they become sharers in our devotions, and impart to the most solitary of them somewhat of a social character.

To the devotional poetry of our language very considerable additions have, of late years, been made, and thus the compiler of a work like this has the opportunity of making a more diversified choice than was possible at any time in the past. Devotion is no exception to those emotions which love to express themselves in verse. When, to words aptly chosen, is added the charm of measure and rhyme, and these are wedded to musical modulation, the highest and most moving expression of devotional feeling is attained. Wordsworth, in one of his prefaces, referring, I think, to Pope's *Epistle to Eloisa to Abelard*, remarks that by the power of verse Pope has contrived to render the plainest common sense interesting, and frequently to invest it with the appearance of passion. It is thus with devotional poetry,—the want of novelty in the thought is often compensated for by the melody of the versification, which lifts it out of the level of commonplace and deepens the impression made by it on the mind.

What Dr. Johnson said of devotional poetry,—that it is always unsatisfactory, and that no man has written it well,—has often been refuted by example since his time. In fact, it was sufficiently refuted before in the sacred songs of the Hebrews, and in the grand hymn which Milton puts into the mouths of our first parents while yet in paradise, as they stood at the door of their bower in the glory of the morning. I might instance also, as a proof of its fallacy, the magnificent hymn with which Thomson closes his poem of the Seasons, magnificent in spite of its blemishes. The "Hymn before

sunrise, in the Valley of Chamouny," by Coleridge, one of the noblest poems in our language, or any other, needs only to be mentioned in order to show how great was Johnson's mistake. A great number of shorter poems designed to be sung in religious assemblies, of such decided merit as to show the perfect compatibility of poetry and worship, have been written since Johnson's time and incorporated into our collections of hymns, such as that of Cowper, beginning with "God moves in a mysterious way"; that of Sir Walter Scott, with this initial line, "When Israel, of the Lord beloved"; that of Mrs. Adams, beginning with "Nearer, my God, to thee"; the Christmas hymn of Rev. Dr. Sears; and others, of which we might make up a list quite too long for the limits of this preface. Of late the attention of a large class of readers has been turned to devotional poetry, and numerous collections have been made to satisfy the demand for it,—some by authorized committees of religious denominations, and others by laymen on their own account. Some of these have had a wide circulation. I do not include the Hebrew Melodies of Byron in this enumeration, since they can scarcely be called devotional. Some of Moore's sacred songs may; and these are as well done as most of his other verses. But there is Keble, who has written largely and little else than poetry of a religious character, and who, if not always fervent, is always earnest and simple, and attains a certain classic dignity. The hymns of the Wesleys are of a warmer cast, and some of them have great literary merit, although Charles Wesley often yielded to his facility in composition and diluted his verse too freely. That his hymns were frequently thrown off in moments of devotional enthusiasm, is attested by their effect upon those who hear them sung at camp-meetings, when the throng of singers seem to catch inspiration from the words of the poet. To this stock of original poetry may be added the translations which have appeared within a few years, of the fine old mediæval hymns in Latin, well deserving by their simple grandeur to be domesticated in our language.

Some use has been made in this compilation of the writings

of authors with whom the compiler does not agree in regard to certain points of Christian doctrine. Passages from these authors have found a place here, not only because they are pertinent and well expressed, but because they strikingly illustrate the fact that the human mind, whatever creed it may hold, turns naturally and with a strong impulse to an all-wise, all-powerful and supremely benignant Being, and is not satisfied without being, in some way, brought into communion with him. That unutterable yearning of the spirit to hold converse with the Creator, of which the apostle speaks, is not repressed even by those sceptical tendencies which pare down the religious belief of the individual to the slenderest remnant of doctrine.

To conclude, this work is designed for those who would cultivate the habit of beginning and closing the day with some grateful recognition of the goodness of God, some supplication for his continual protection, some petition for his blessing upon their brethren of the human race; some acknowledgment of the frailty of their own virtue, and the need of his aid to strengthen their good resolutions. In the contents of this volume, gathered from a large variety of sources, it is hoped that they may find passages which by the force of expression or aptness of illustration may so impress their minds that they may willingly and frequently recur to its use.

WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT.

Roslyn, Long Island, October, 1877.

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