

DEACON HERBERT'S BIBLE-CLASS

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Deacon Herbert's Bible-Class by James Freeman Clarke

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JAMES FREEMAN CLARKE

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BY

JAMES FREEMAN CLARKE

BOSTON

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"Deacon Herbert's Bible-class" was first written as a series of papers, and printed in the *Christian Inquirer*, many years ago. These papers have been collected and put into their present shape with the hope that they may be of some use to Bible-classes and Sunday-school Teachers.

L. F. C.

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Deacon Herbert's Bible-class.

I.

THE WAY WE HELPED OUR MINISTER TO WRITE GOOD SERMONS.

ONE evening (it was Monday) I stopped at the post-office after the school was out, to get my papers, with a secret hope also, I admit, that I might find a letter in a fair female hand. The mail was not sorted; and, while waiting, I listened to a conversation which was going on in the office.

"That sermon yesterday was too bad," said young Townsend, the lawyer. "I really think I shall leave off going to meeting. It does me no good. I feel so vexed and ashamed that I should be better at home."

"What was the matter with the sermon?" said Farmer Haystack. "I was sick on Sunday, and stayed at home."

"The whole parish will be sick on Sunday,

soon," replied Townsend. "Matter? Nothing was the matter: that was just it. There was no matter in the sermon at all. It was a perfect phenomenon, it was so empty."

"Then it illustrated Bishop Berkeley's theory of the world,—not substantial, only phenomenal," said young George Classic, who was spending his college vacation among us. No one seemed to notice his remark, however.

"I should not mind much the sermon's being empty," said Dr. Hunter: "if that were all, I could go to sleep. But the minister puts such odd things into it, which have nothing to do with his subject. He tells us the stories we have just been reading in the newspapers."

"And tells them as if he had half forgotten them," added another.

"He seems half asleep all the time," continued Dr. Hunter. "Then he must needs be always talking about slavery,—a thing we have nothing to do with. I have no doubt Squire Merrimac, who owns so much factory stock, and whose son is married in Georgia to a planter's daughter, will leave the society before long."

"My friends," said a quiet voice from behind me, "it is our fault that our minister does not

write good sermons. We do not help him write good sermons. We do not help him write them, as we ought."

I looked around, and saw Deacon Herbert. The deacon was a man whom everybody loved and respected. They loved him for his familiar, affectionate interest in the whole community, and for his perpetual usefulness. He was always doing some good thing, and inducing others to join him in his good enterprises. He was respected for his keen sagacity and sterling sense. He was apt to put things in rather a paradoxical way, and no one always knew at first whether he were speaking seriously or ironically. But this drew attention; and he was sure to show before he had done speaking that there was a button of gold deposited by his analysis at the bottom of the crucible. So we all turned round to hear the deacon.

"How can we help him write good sermons, Deacon?" said Townsend.

"Not the way you are doing now. This talk of yours will make them five per cent. worse. The next time you go to church you will all feel bound, for the sake of consistency, to find fault with something; and so the sermon will seem

worse than ever. And it will be worse, too; for he will feel your want of sympathy, and that will freeze his thoughts. No: if we want good sermons, we must help write them ourselves."

"I thought it the minister's duty to write the sermon, not ours," said Townsend.

"So it is your business to argue in court for your clients. But suppose they should not care a copper whether you won their case or not, and should not furnish you with the facts, and should sometimes give you wrong information on the subject. Suppose the jury should yawn and go to sleep during your argument, and the judge read the newspaper. What sort of an argument would you make then?"

"But we pay our minister a good salary, and he has nothing to do but to write sermons, and ought to write interesting ones," said Dr. Hunter.

"The citizens of this town might pay you five thousand dollars a year to attend them when sick," returned Herbert; "but, if they would not tell you their symptoms, nor take your medicine, would the five thousand dollars help you cure them?"

"But still," said Townsend, "I do not see