

ESSAYS IN APPLICATION

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Essays in Application by Henry Van Dyke

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HENRY VAN DYKE

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BY
HENRY VAN DYKE

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PREFACE

THE forces that impel action reside in temperament. The ideals and convictions that guide it are hidden in the mind and heart. A man moves slowly or swiftly, he does his work weakly or strongly, according to the energy that is in him. But the direction of his life, this way or that way, follows the unseen influence of what he admires and loves and believes in.

It is not easy to take stock of these controlling ideals and convictions, and estimate them at their true value. It is harder still to arrange and order them in a system—clear, logical, consistent—a philosophy of life. Few men have the ability to make such a total state-

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ment of their spiritual assets. Even for those who might be able to do it after a fashion, it is difficult to find the time, because they are actively engaged in the business of living.

But every now and then, in writing or in speaking, a man who takes his affair seriously has occasion to meet one or another of the problems of life in a way that calls him to get at his inmost convictions and to apply them to the matter in hand. It is not always possible, nor often necessary, to give an elaborate description of his point of view, or to trace the paths of inheritance or reasoning by which he has reached it. These are things that will probably betray themselves, clearly enough, in his work. Whether he be materialist or idealist, radical or conservative, optimist or pessimist or meliorist, what he has to do is just to stand where he be-

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longs, and to put his ideals in application to the question before him.

That which is spoken or written in this way may have some value, proportionate to its lucidity and sincerity, as a partial showing of the practical conclusions to which certain principles lead. And if, as I believe, life is the test of thought, rather than thought the test of life, we should be able to get light on the real worth of a man's theories, ideals, beliefs, by looking at the shape which they would give to human existence if they were faithfully applied.

It is in this way that the chapters of this book have been written, and thus I should like to have the reader take them. I have tried to touch on certain points in education, in politics, in literature, in religion, in the conduct of life, from the standpoint of one who wishes to

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be guided in every-day judgments and affairs by a sane idealism. The book makes no claim to be a defense, or even a statement, of a complete system of philosophy or faith. It is simply a collection of essays in application.