

**THE GOSPEL OF  
CONSOLATION;  
UNIVERSITY AND  
CATHEDRAL SERMONS**

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The gospel of consolation; university and cathedral sermons by William Danks

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## PREFACE

It is hoped that this volume will do something to maintain, not only the memory, but the influence of a Preacher of great and peculiar power. Before nominating him to a canonry in Canterbury Cathedral, the Prime Minister, Sir Henry Campbell Bannerman, had, as he himself told me, read through the volume of sermons entitled, *The Church on the Moor*, and that volume exhibited the characteristics which were developed with increasing power in Canon Danks' sermons here. The chief element in them seemed to be the deep human sympathy with which the revelation of the Bible, from first to last, was interpreted in its bearing on daily experience. Bacon observes that if you are to get men to listen to words of wisdom, you must first tell them what is in their own hearts, and you must find a point of departure in their own thoughts and feelings. That was conspicuously Canon Danks' method. It was apparent, from the outset, that he was addressing himself to difficulties or troubles which he knew to be in the hearts of his audience, because he shared them himself; and he thus gained their attention. Once gained, it was kept

throughout by the earnest and skilful manner in which the Divine messages of the Scriptures were applied to these human perplexities or sufferings, and were shown to be their true interpretation and alleviation. The craving of the human heart was kept in view throughout, and was heard asserting itself incessantly; and the positive or dogmatic teaching was never allowed to override it. His theological sympathies leaned to the school of modern Churchmanship which endeavours to reinterpret, in the terms of to-day, the ancient language of the Faith. But he was more concerned to show how the old truths met modern needs than how the form of expressing them could be modified. For this reason he was a welcome preacher to all audiences, learned or unlearned. He was peculiarly welcome in a university pulpit or in a cathedral, but he was not less acceptable in a country church. We miss him sorely in Canterbury Cathedral; but there are country churches around in which he often preached on a Sunday morning, and where his teaching will be cherished and his loss deeply regretted. Since the war commenced his sympathy with its sacrifices, its sorrows, and at the same time its moral heights and depths, evoked still deeper tones in his addresses, and some of these will be found among the most touching passages in this volume. Not long before his death, when we were referring to some recent movements of thought, he told me he was chiefly anxious to prevent the essential truths of the Faith losing their hold over minds which were interested in modern critical and historical views.

To this object I am sure he contributed very materially, and this volume may be a welcome solace to many perplexed as well as sorrowing hearts.

It would be out of place for me to say much of him in other capacities. But I cannot but add that in all the duties of a member of a Cathedral Chapter, he was an admirable colleague, and that as a companion and friend he was warmly beloved. He had to endure much suffering of late, and we are thankful, amidst our deep regrets, that he rests in peace.

H. WACE,  
Dean of Canterbury.

*July, 1916.*



## AN APPRECIATION

THE mood of the moment is towards organization : we are all eager to see the forces of the country draw into perfect and co-operative harmony, so that the highest material effectiveness may be attained. For the time we think in masses, and we see clearly what assembled armies whether of fighters or home workers can do. But when we reflect we see that the efficiency of these masses depends upon the spirit of the individuals who are toiling or combating. It is with us to-day as it is with us when we stand upon the seashore, and are impressed by the massive majesty of the ocean and hear the thunder of its waves like the sound of a single voice. Yet as we watch and listen we can mark the foaming circle made by each wave and note the form of its pressure on sand or shingle before it falls back to the bosom of the sea. The individuals make up the masses as the waves make up the ocean, and each one makes its imprint and so fulfils its errand. The value and force of its influence cannot be measured by size or weight or even by any definable result, but it has not spent itself in vain : it has achieved something and having achieved it, to the great deep it returns.

Nothing is finally lost of Nature's forces, and of human forces the chief question to be asked is : " With what spirit do they come ? " The abiding effective power of peoples and nations depends upon the spirit which animates the individuals which make up the masses : our gratitude is due to all who can effectively help in diffusing among the people the influence of a high,

pure and true spirit. The prophet saw this, who beheld the vision of the sacred temple light, and noted that the lamp was fed by the oil from the mystic olive trees. If the tree yielded its oil, the lamp of national hope and national piety glowed brightly.

Herein lies the use and the joy of the preacher: he can act as the golden pipe to convey the sacred oil by which the lamp may be fed. His value depends upon the pure quality of the influence which he wields. With what spirit does he come to animate the people to whom he ministers?

It is as a preacher that the late Canon Danks is regarded by those who have written the kind and seasonable words contained in the memoir prefixed to this volume of his sermons. There were those who when his book *The Church on the Moor* was published criticized his sermons not by what he said but by what he did not say. One newspaper writer urged this criticism: he missed something which he had been accustomed to hear, and as he could not find fault with what was said, for it was excellent and excellently said, he fell back upon uncharitable innuendo and complained about the preacher's sins of omission. Canon Danks did not deal in cant phrases, and cant phrases are dear to unthinking minds, and when these are not heard such minds grow uneasy.

This criticism is uncharitable, and it is unintelligent also: the preacher if he be true to himself—and Canon Danks was true to his own heart—must give the message with which he has been entrusted: it is not for him to utter phrases which have lost their meaning or from which the original spirit has evaporated. He must speak truth as it has unfolded itself to him in his own life and experience. This is what Canon Danks sought to do

and what he did do so successfully. Truth is divine, and it is truth divine which the preacher must seek to set forth : but he must clothe it in human speech : treat it in the language in which alone it is true to the speaker : not in borrowed terms nor in obsolete phraseology, but in the words which the full heart and earnest mind feel to be the fittest to express the truth. It was not for nothing that the Divine Word became incarnate. We only learn the divine through the human. Truth unfolded in a tale which incorporates human experience, not only enters in at lowly doors but finds its way persuasively into human hearts, bringing them the reinvigoration and comfort of the presence of a divine guest. Truth divine is truth for the heart : truth to feel, to know and to live by.

This is the secret, I think, which Canon Danks possessed : it explains the warm welcome given to his published sermons, and the felt influence of his words among those who heard him. Of him we might say, he was no dogmatist because he was no rationalist : he knew what life around him was crying out for : he wished to dispense not stones but bread : the anxious, the sorrowing, the perplexed, the depressed did not want arguments or definitions, but food for their souls. He heard the Divine voice saying, "Give ye them to eat," and so he took of his store and set it before the multitudes in faith that He who gave the command would make it suffice and fill perhaps the hungry soul with gladness.

Thus Canon Danks preached : he fed his people with a faithful and true heart.

W. BOYD CARPENTER.

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