

**THE IDLE WORD: SHORT
RELIGIOUS ESSAYS UPON THE
GIFT OF SPEECH, AND ITS
EMPLOYMENT IN
CONVERSATION**

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The idle word: short religious essays upon the gift of speech, and its employment in conversation
by Edward Meyrick Goulburn

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EDWARD MEYRICK GOULBURN

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IN MEMORY
OF THE LATE
RIGHT HON. HENRY GOULBURN, M.P.,
WHO HAS PASSED TO HIS REST
SINCE THIS TREATISE
ON THE GOVERNMENT OF THE TONGUE,
A GRACE WHICH HE SINGULARLY
EXEMPLIFIED,
WAS FIRST INSCRIBED TO HIM.



P R E F A C E .



THE reader of this little Book will soon discover from the style adopted in parts of it, that the substance of the several Chapters has been delivered in the form of Sermons. But the throwing of these Sermons into the form of short Religious Essays has given me the opportunity of introducing matter unsuited for the Pulpit, and of erasing much which had only a special reference to the circumstances and temptations of my own flock. At the same time, I have felt unwilling (in this, as in a former publication) to omit entirely all practical addresses and appeals of a devotional character, however out of place such passages may seem to be in an Essay. For indeed I feel that all exclusively speculative treatment of Religious Subjects (and specially of a

subject having so close a bearing upon practice, as that with which the following Pages deal) is to be avoided. We do not think on these subjects aright, unless our minds are led on from the theory of them to the influence which they ought to exercise upon our practice,—unless we allow them to stir within us the sentiments and aspirations of devotion. Nor, except we view them under this light, are we safe from erroneous conclusions respecting them. For right conclusions on Religious subjects cannot be formed by those who speculate upon them in a wrong, or in a defective, spirit.

To some, I fear, the Rules of Conversation here proposed may appear too strict, and even impossible to be carried out. May I request that such Readers will consider, before they reject the Rules, what is said in Chapter VII. on Words of Innocent Recreation?

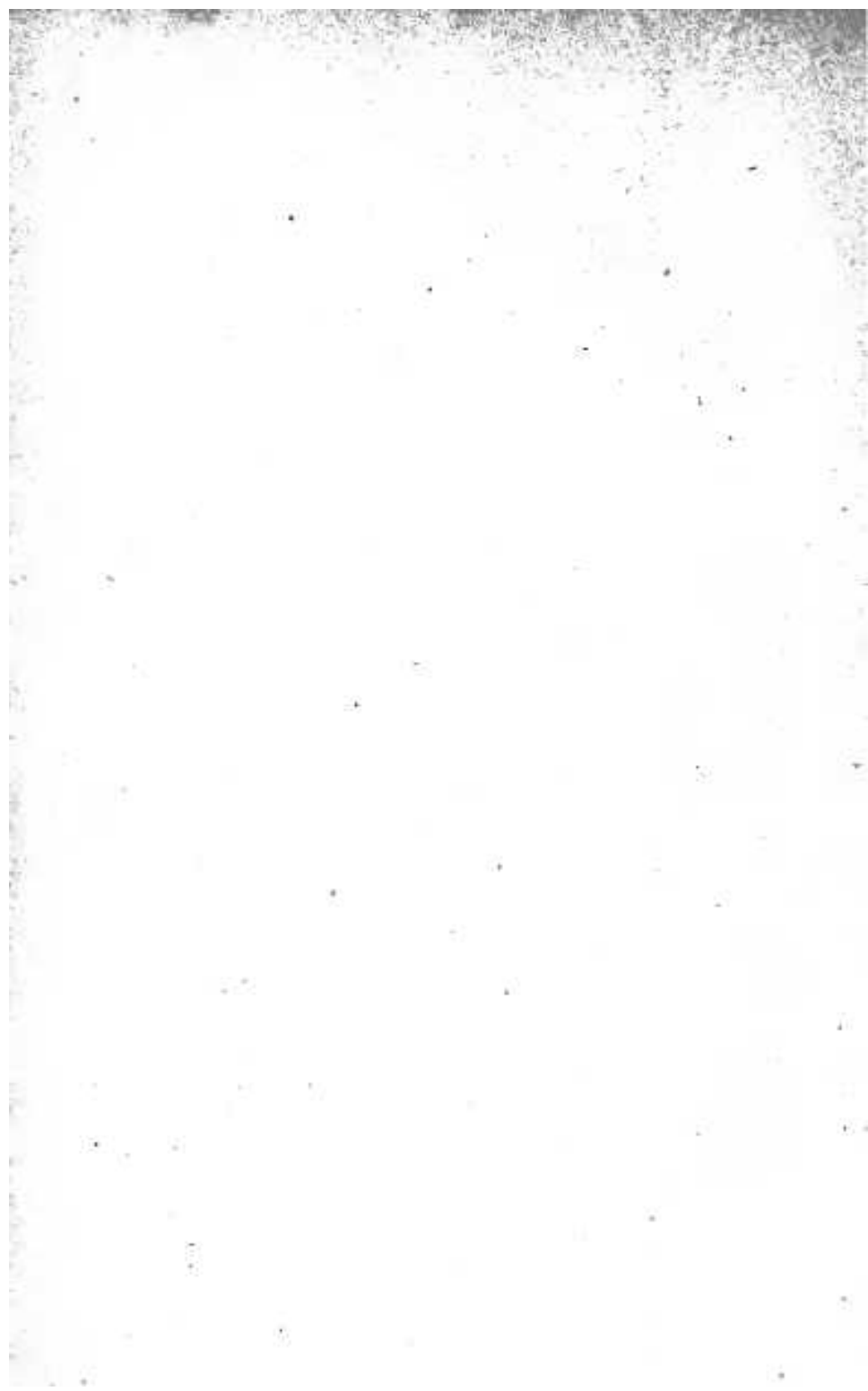
I may have erred doubtless in some of my applications of it to practice,—but I cannot see my way to evade the general principle, that words, to redeem themselves from the charge of being idle, *must fulfil some one of the ends which words were designed to fulfil.* These ends are indicated at length in the body of the Work, and it only remains for me to say, that a wider scope should possibly be



Preface.

given to the term, "innocent recreation," than it was consistent with the nature of a religious essay to set forth. A great many words which cannot be justly called witty, or humorous, yet tend to relieve the burdens of life, and to lighten the heart with a glean of merriment; nor would it be possible to enter into any useful conversation without passing through the preliminary porch of lighter remarks, and repartees upon ordinary topics. If such things were precluded, conversation would lose its ease and gaiety, and with these its power of refreshing the mind. To preserve this power (which ought always to attach to it), while at the same time guarding against empty words, and the encroachment of a spirit of unwatchfulness, is doubtless an arduous task,—one of the most arduous perhaps which the Christian has to achieve; but it is our encouragement and consolation to know that our Merciful Lord never commands impossibilities, and offers us not only the guidance of general principles in His Word, but also Grace and Light to direct the individual conscience, in its attempts to apply those principles to the conduct of daily life.

E. M. G.



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