

**SERMONS BROAD AND
SHORT WITH A DISCOURSE
ON NATURAL RELIGION**

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Sermons Broad and Short with a Discourse on Natural Religion by Henry H. Higgins

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HENRY H. HIGGINS

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SERMONS

BROAD AND SHORT

WITH A

DISCOURSE ON NATURAL RELIGION

BY

HENRY H. HIGGINS, M.A.

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I.

ISAIAH LV.

Is it possible to engage, on the side of this sublime chapter, the sympathies of modern thought? We all feel that it is to us as a very lovely song of one who hath a pleasant voice and can play well upon an instrument—what is it more than this? We have ceased to look upon the Bible as a miracle; except in the sense that the lives and thoughts of the best men have been, and are always, miraculous. They cannot be made to order; or by experiment; they cannot be accounted for by surroundings, or by hereditary transmission. Human they are, but there is that in them which is conspicuously divine. The lives and thoughts of the best men die not. Ages pass, bringing mighty revolutions; but as in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man. If our modern thoughts be true and wise, they *must* find herein a common element.

I. INVITATION.—“Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye,

buy and eat ; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money, and without price."

We *do* thirst : we cannot live in the present and in the past ; neither can the future be indifferent to us. The desire of one is not the same with the desire of another ; but some aim, some object, some event yet to be fulfilled, engages our thoughts almost perpetually. By a kind of self-coercion, we study and learn wisdom from the past. Set free, our thoughts fly back to the future. I do not mean the great future, but the next hour, to-morrow, when we have finished our task whatever it may be. We all thirst : we wish for that which may gladden our hearts, and support our strength—for the wine and for the milk—but life is worth living only because happiness cannot be purchased by wealth ; nor can strength to endure to the end be secured by the payment of a large price. Our true wealth is in the character of God. Therefore, the good desired *must* be received freely, without money and without price ; for who hath first given unto Him ?

II. EXPOSTULATION.—“Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which *satisfieth not* ?”

It might be easy to make out a strong case against many of the pursuits on which men spend their money and their toil. Riches make to themselves wings; and the rich man shall carry away nothing with him when he dieth. Fame and pleasure, it is said, have been weighed in the balance, and have been found wanting. But this chapter is not written in the spirit of the Preacher—vanity of vanities, all is vanity. It is the call of wisdom, and not the morose croaking of the cynic. Wisdom is heard expostulating with the lovers of darkness and the chasers of a shadow. Hearken diligently unto me. Wisdom, the brightest and happiest of teachers. See all that is said of wisdom in the Bible; and of her power of discerning fresh springs of joy even in the valley of disappointment. Come, now, let us reason together—"What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed?"

III. REVELATION.—"Incline your ear and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David. Behold, I have given him for a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people."

The very name of David suggested to a Jew a strong and righteous ruler. The lapse of time had borne away

far out of sight all David's sins, and magnified the glorious qualities that made Israel proud of such a king. I know not whether Isaiah thought that David would personally reign on earth. The martyr, Stephen, thought it was needful to show that Christ was not David alive again. Very inspiring was the prophet's anticipation of righteousness combined with power. A poor weak king like Hezekiah, though he might be very pious, was useless. He could do no more than order fasts and passovers. We ourselves sadly need the power of some mighty understanding, to uphold amongst us the cause of goodness and truth. We have a strong God; but those who claim to be His representatives amongst men are too weak for the age.

IV. EXHORTATION.—“Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him: and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.”

There is nothing in the course of modern thought which can render this exhortation less applicable to ourselves *than it was to Israel*. Learned writers assert that the