

SOCIAL ASPECTS OF CHRISTIANITY

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Social Aspects of Christianity by Brooke Foss Westcott

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BROOKE FOSS WESTCOTT

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OF CHRISTIANITY**

L. B. Davy.
July 1858.

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SECRET



SOCIAL ASPECTS

OF

CHRISTIANITY

BY

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ΠΕΠΛΗΡΩΤΑΙ ὁ καιρὸς, καὶ ἤγγικεν ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ
θεοῦ. μετανοεῖτε καὶ πιστεύετε ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ.

ST MARK I. 15.

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PREFACE.

THE Sermons in the present volume were preached (with two exceptions) during my residence at Westminster in August and December, 1886. I have indeed endeavoured to enforce the main ideas which they contain at various times during the last thirty years; but the opportunity seemed to require that I should endeavour to bring, as far as I could, into a clear and connected form what had been spoken only fragmentarily before. No one indeed can tell what is the effect which 'the Abbey' and the vast congregations which gather there, eager to listen, produce upon one who first experiences it at the close of life. Of all places in the world 'the Abbey,' I think, proclaims the social Gospel of Christ with the most touching eloquence.

So it was that when I was called to work at Westminster in 1884 I could not but feel with intense force the power of old thoughts, and in the first sermon of my first residence I indicated a line of teaching which I hoped to pursue if the time were given. Some passages from that Sermon will serve as an introduction to what follows.

When we are by the force of circumstances, or more truly by the loving providence of God, brought face to
w. s. b

face with a great fact, a great duty, a great idea, and stand as it were alone in its presence, we are, I fancy, startled to find how little we have ever really thought upon it, how slenderly we are prepared to give any account of its relation to ourselves. We grow familiar with traditional criticisms: we adopt conventional customs: we repeat popular phrases; but all these lie for the most part outside our own actual experience: we have not made them our own by resolute reflection and self-questioning. The fact, the duty, the idea, is itself strange to us.

Is not this true of that which is for each one of us the greatest fact, the greatest duty, the greatest idea, life itself? How few of us pause even at such a time and in such a place as this to consider what life is, not in its circumstances but in its energy, in its capacities, in its issues. We all know, even if the knowledge has little practical effect, that no measure of time or sense gives a standard of its value. Life is more than the sum of personal enjoyments and pains through which it finds expression; more than the length of days in which it is visible to human eyes; more than the fulness of means which reveals to us its power. All these pass away, but in the process of their vanishing a spiritual result has been fulfilled. The soul of the man has been brought into fellowship—a fellowship welcomed or disregarded—with men and with the world and with God. It has consciously or unconsciously learnt much and done much. It has shaped a character for itself; it has helped to shape a character for others. It is at the end, most solemn thought, 'as it has been used.' *Life* then, we can see, *consists not in abundance*, in the overflowing richness of unemployed resources: it springs not spontaneously *from the things which we possess*, from our original endowments, as the necessary product of natural gifts. It is the opportunity of the individual to win for God by God's help that which lies within his reach: to accomplish on a scale little or

great the destiny of humanity as it has been committed to him : to consecrate, it may be, splendid wealth to common service : to transfigure sordid cares by a divine vision : to rise to the truth of the Incarnation as the revelation of the purpose of the Father for the world which He made.

Life, in a word, as has been most nobly said,

Life, with all it yields of joy and woe,
And hope and fear,
Is just our chance o' the prize of learning love,
How love might be, hath been indeed, and is.

Now it is here, I believe, in this view of life realised among us, of life as individual in its responsibility and social in its aims, that we shall find the sure hope of a solution of the terrible riddles of existence which meet us on all sides. The overwhelming sorrows by which we are surrounded and saddened, if we regard them steadily, make the Gospel of Christ—the Son of God and the Son of man—intrinsically credible. Nothing less could meet our wants, and this does meet them. But, in order that we may gain the inspiration of the glad-tidings, we must strive at least to reach forward to its scope, strive to find how it passes on this side and that beyond the utmost range of human thought, how it covers the whole field of being in which it is revealed, how it encourages and sustains us in the endeavour to understand practically that we are all bound one to another in the turmoil of our present conflict, bound to the past of which we are the children, bound to the future of which we are the parents, in the fellowship of our manhood which Christ came to save. As long as we isolate ourselves, and strive to stand apart, peace is impossible. But joy comes—the joy of Christ which no one taketh away—when we are enabled to sympathise in deed and in truth with the purpose of His redeeming love, to apprehend, however feebly and imperfectly, that below the wastes and wearinesses and wickednesses, on which we look, enduring beyond all that is of time, subsisting beyond