

ARTHUR GRANVILLE; OR, THE GIFTS OF GOD.

ADDRESS TO CHILDREN.

CHAPTER VI.

"Lord, I have loved the habitation of Thy house, and the place where Thy honour dwelleth."

"His delight is in the law of the Lord."

"Evening, and morning, and noon will I pray."

Psalm.

The following day was Sunday; showery and unsettled, with occasional gleams of sunshine.

One of these gleams was lighting up the rain-drops and glowing on the distant landscape, as Arthur opened his window at seven o'clock, to breathe the fresh morning air.

He leaned his elbow on the window-seat, and inclined his head forward, whilst his eyes wandered hither and thither, as if he had never beheld the scene, every inch of which was so familiar to them.

Arthur scarcely knew what it was that made him so happy at that moment; he felt, though unconsciously, the influence of the beautiful works of creation on his mind; so unconsciously, indeed, that had it been hinted to him that it was the garden before him, he would not have been surprised to find it so.

The richly varied country in the distance, the trees in the neighbouring copse, the song of the birds, the bright sun, or all these combined, which created the feeling of thorough enjoyment in his mind, he would have disowned it.

How could that garden please him, which he every day declared was so ugly? How could it, and wished it could be altered? He quite forgot the landscape, when he was always puzzled to know why in the world the friends who came to see his parents should stand so long at the window to admire it?

The sun, too, always came in his eyes while he was dressing; it was so welcome! And then there were no nice larks, or nightingales, or canaries in the copse, only finches and robins; and he cared not, because of the acorns and oak-apples. How could these things have given him any pleasure as he looked upon them and listened to them from his bed-room window, repeating almost mechanically the first verse of a hymn his mother had appointed him to learn?

"This is the day the Lord hath made, He calls the hours his own; Let heaven rejoice and earth be glad, And praise around the throne."

"I wonder why," thought Arthur, "Oh, because it goes on—"

"To-day He rose and left the dead, And Satan's empire fell."

That reminds me of what mamma said to me yesterday. How dark it has come over!"

And so, indeed, it had. A cloud had passed over the sun, and again the rain fell in a steady shower.—Arthur shut the window and continued his toilet.

"I wonder why I feel so happy," thought he, pursuing his meditations. "I don't see that I have any reason to be particularly happy this morning. I dare say mamma, or Agnes, would find out some good reason for it, but I'm sure I cannot. But I must make haste and dress."

When the time arrived for getting ready for church, Arthur bent his steps towards his room. As he passed the staircase window, he stopped for an instant to look at the clouds. If Arthur looked doubtfully at them, they looked down still more doubtfully on him; so, instead of continuing his journey to his own bedroom, he went to his mother's dressing-room and inquired if she was going to church.

"Not this morning, my dear," replied she. "The weather is so unsettled, and my cold still so troublesome, I think it would not be prudent for me to go out; nor for you either, with your cough, Arthur.—We invalids must keep one another company at home."

"Then I will fetch my Bible and Prayer-book, and read the Psalms and Lessons to you, shall I mamma?"

"Do so, my dear boy," said Mrs. Granville, and Arthur hastened to fetch them.

"It is the twenty-seventh day of the month," he observed, as he drew his chair beside his mother, and opened his Prayer-book. When he had finished reading the Psalms, he said:

"Mamma, how curious that it should be the 122d Psalm to-day!"

"Why curious, Arthur?"

"Because it says, 'I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord,' just the very morning we could not go to the house of the Lord. It is very curious it should have happened so!"

"It is a very beautiful psalm," observed his mother, "and shows how precious to God's people in all ages have been the means of grace."

"Oh, mamma, that puts me in mind of a question I have always wanted to ask you; what are the means of grace?"

"I will tell you then, Arthur," replied his mother; "but you surely understand what grace is?"

"Oh, yes, mamma," said Arthur; "the Holy Spirit puts grace in our hearts when He teaches us to do what is right, and makes people hate sin."

"Quite right, Arthur; that is called sanctifying grace; and God's forgiveness of sin is called—"

"Pardoning grace," said Arthur. "And then you know, mamma, that is Redeeming grace, which Jesus showed when he died to redeem us."

"Very well, Arthur; I see you understand what grace is; then it appears you want to know what means are."

"Yes, mamma."

"Now you must answer me a question. How do we get rice, sugar, tea, and other articles from foreign countries?"

"They are brought over in ships, mamma," said Arthur.

"Or you might have said, 'by means of ships'; for ships are the means by which all those articles are brought from other lands?"

"Oh, mamma, I have often heard people talk of doing things 'by means' of something, and I know what they mean when they say so, but I did not think that the word meant the same when we spoke of 'means of grace.'"

"And what do you understand, Arthur, by 'means?'"

"Let me hear if you have any more definite idea of it than you had?"

"Why, mamma, it is a way of getting something—it is not 'by.' Ships are the way for getting rice and sugar, and all those things, and—and—" continued he, looking round the room, "incense matches are a means of getting light, and a fire is a means of getting heat, and so is the sun."

"Very well, you appear to understand it," said Mrs. Granville. "And may there not be ways of getting grace, too?"

"Yes, mamma, I suppose so," said Arthur; "but God gives us grace, you know."

"But He has appointed means through which we are to seek it of Him," said Mrs. Granville. "Look in Luke xi, and see if you can find a means which Jesus speaks of for obtaining the help of the Holy Spirit."

"Here, mamma," said Arthur, "He says God will give His Holy Spirit to them that ask Him."

"Then that 'asking,' is a means of grace, a way by which we obtain grace," said Mrs. Granville. "What word do we use to express 'asking,' when it is addressed to God?"

"Prayer, mamma," replied Arthur. "Oh, then, prayer is a means of grace, because we are to pray to God for every kind of grace we want."

"Yes, Arthur, prayer is a means of grace; and now that you seem to understand the subject, and have moreover given me an example to prove that that is the case, perhaps you can still further, and mention to me some more of the means of grace."

Arthur began to consider, and while doing so, he happened to turn his eyes upon the Prayer-book,

which was still open at the Psalms he had been reading. This reminded him of what had given rise to the conversation.

"Oh, mamma," said he, "you said David felt the means of grace precious, and you found it out by the 122d Psalm. Then going to the house of the Lord must be a means of grace."

"Yes, Arthur, the public worship of God, as well as private prayer, is one of the appointed means of gaining spiritual blessings. Reading the Holy Scriptures is another, and then, what you will better understand when you are older, the Sacraments."

"Oh, yes, mamma! I have just thought of what the Catechism says about the Sacraments, 'a means whereby we receive the same'; and 'the same' means the 'inward and spiritual grace.' Don't you remember, mamma?"

"Yes, perfectly," said Mrs. Granville.

"And I have thought of another thing," said Arthur, "which is, that all these means of grace belong to the list of God's spiritual mercies."

"And how richly are they showered down upon us!" observed Mrs. Granville. "What country in the world is so blessed with the means of grace as England is? Well might it be said to us, 'what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness!'"

If David felt glad when it was said to him, "Let us go into the house of the Lord," to that temple whose ordinances, solemn and beautiful as they were, were but types of 'better things,' much more should our hearts rise in grateful joy when we are invited to join praises of that God who has sent His Son, that Saviour who has died for our sins, and that Holy Spirit who has been largely poured out in these 'Gospel times!'"

And even in this favoured country, Arthur, many are the children who have not half the opportunities which you have for learning to know God. Many have parents who never, perhaps, offered a single prayer for themselves or their children. You from your birth have been the object of your parents' daily prayer. You are taught daily the lessons of God's word, while many, as young as yourself, are being brought up in the ways of sin and Satan, ignorant of that which can make them 'wise unto salvation.' You are encouraged to God in prayer; you go to His house, and are taught to reverence His day.—Arthur, are you thankful for these privileges? Is your thankfulness shown by the use you make of them? Put the question to your own conscience, my child, and pray to God to pardon your negligences, and to teach you to use His gifts aright. For remember, Arthur, all these things are means of grace, not grace itself. They are ways of obtaining knowledge of our own sinfulness, acquaintance with the holy character of our God, and of the way by which alone we can be saved and accepted by Him, strength to fight against and overcome our spiritual enemies. Let us not, as many are apt to do, regard our punctual attendance on these ordinances as a proof that we are walking in the paths of holiness, for, in itself, it is no proof at all, and the idea would only puff us up with self-righteousness; but let us ever aim at seeking for God by his appointed means, and never be satisfied till we have obtained what they are designed to convey to us."

Mrs. Granville paused for a few seconds, and then continued:

"You know, Arthur, that there are some countries almost destitute of the means of grace, and some quite so."

"Yes, mamma," said Arthur; "I know the heathen countries are."

"And some of our own colonies, which are settlements of persons of our own country, are, to a great extent in a sad condition. I remember being, last summer, at a meeting of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Part, (which Society was formed chiefly for the purpose of affording religious privileges to our own countrymen settled abroad in different parts of the world,) and at that meeting we had a most melancholy picture presented to us of the misery caused by an absence of the means of grace—"

"In some places there is not a church for a hundred square miles, and such poor people are denied the privileges they used to enjoy, and pant after partaking of them again, are obliged to unite in a party to travel two or three times a year to the nearest church, that they may not entirely lose the blessing of joining in the public worship of God. We, Arthur, can hardly conceive such a state of things."

"No, mamma; it seems quite natural to go to church every Sunday."

"Like that poor blind boy, whom papa took us to see one day," said Arthur. "He said that before he lost his sight, he used to think his mother's cottage the ugliest in the village; but that now he would be very glad to see it and would not call it ugly, if he could."

"And I dare say he would make no complaints of the garden, and wish it were different, or of the chimneys, if he could see them."

"Dear mamma," said Arthur, "I will try and leave off finding fault with all those things, and try to remember they are God's gifts. And if you will often talk to them about them, that will remind me, and help me to keep my resolution."

"I am truly rejoiced, Arthur," replied his mother, "that you really have a wish to overcome your sad propensity to discontent. A sincere wish to do right is a great encouragement to hope for success in future endeavours. Now get your Bible, and read the Lessons to me, my love; and," added she, kissing him, "may God bless you with a grateful heart, which may lead you to sing aloud of His righteousness, and faithfulness, and mercy; to show forth His praise by your life here, and join the angels' hallelujahs in heaven hereafter!"

to examine our estates, whether we are yet renewed or no, and in the acts which we daily perform, observe whether the sanctifying habit be as yet infused into our souls. If the grounds of our best duties, that which moves us in our holiest actions, be found upon search to be but carnal; if a careful religious education, custom of the place which we live in, fear of human laws, nay, perhaps a good soft tender disposition, and the like, be the things that make thee love God, and perform holy duties, and not any inward principle of sanctity within thee, I counsel thee to think better of thine estate, and consider whether the like motives, had it so happened that thou hadst been born and brought up in Turkey, might not have made thee worship Mahomet. I would be sorry to be rigid; I fear thou wilt find they might. Well, then, a new course must be taken; if thy former heathen, carnal, or at best good moral life, all thy former performances, the best of thy natural desires, must be content to be ranked here with circumscription and unbecoming availing nothing; there is no trust or confidence to be placed on these Egyptian staves of reed. And then, if thou wilt not live heartless for ever, if ever thou meanest to move, or walk, or do anything, you must to Creator of spirits and lover of souls, and never leave soliciting, till he hath breathed another breath into your nostrils, another soul into your soul; you must lay yourself at his feet, and with all the violence, and rhetoric, and humility, that these wants will prompt thee to, work and importune the Holy Spirit to overshadow thee, to conceive all holy graces spiritually in thee; and if thou canst not suddenly receive a gracious answer, that the Holy Ghost will come in unto thee, and lodge with thee this night; yet learn so much patience from thy legary estate, as not to challenge him at thy own times, but comfortably wait his leisure. Whilst thou art preparing, give not over praying; they are acts very compatible; thou mayest do both together. Whilst thou art fortifying these little kingdoms within thee, send these ambassadors abroad for help, that thou mayest be capable of it when it comes. But, above all things, be circumspect, watch and observe the Spirit, and be perpetually ready to receive its blasts. Let it never have breathed on thee in vain; let thine ear be for ever open to its whisperings; if it should pass by thee either unheeded, or not understood, it were a loss that all the treasures upon earth could not repair, and for the most part you know it comes not in the thunder. Christ seldom speaks so loud now-a-days as he did to Saul. It is in a soft still voice; and I will not promise you that man that dwells in a will, that is perpetually engaged in worldly low employments, or that men asleep, shall ever come to hear of it.—Dr. Hammond.

PROPERTY AND ADVERTISING.

If we are in a state of prosperity, in a full possession of all temporal blessings, there seems to be little opportunity for the exercise of patience. Our principal duty, then, is to receive the good things of this life with gratitude and thankful acknowledgment, to consider them as gratuitous and temporary, to use them with moderation and discretion, and to employ them to the honour of God, and to the service of mankind. But since God hath so ordered the course of human things, that there is no perfect happiness, no uninterrupted ease, no sincere pleasure in this life, but troubles and sickness and pain and disappointments and losses and sorrows are scattered up and down here below, and wait for us and overtake us in some part or other of our progress through mortality, we shall scarcely ever want opportunities of exercising the patient and submissive virtues of resignation to the will of the Almighty. In all times and in all circumstances to rely upon him as upon our great friend and benefactor, and firmly to believe that he orders all with perfect wisdom and goodness, and that they who love him shall receive from him whatsoever is expedient for them; this is to honour and worship him, not in words and in pretence, but in deed and in truth, with the heart and understanding and all the powers of the soul, and to pray him the most rational and the most acceptable service.—Archdeacon Jortin.

SICKNESS.

In sickness the soul begins to dress herself for immortality. And first, she unites the strings of vanity, that made her upper garment cleave to the world and sit uneasy. She puts off the light and fantastic summer-robe of lust and wanton appetite.—Next to this, she, by the help of sickness, knocks off the fetters of pride, and vain complacencies. Then she draws the curtain, and stows the light from coming in, and takes the pictures down; those fantastic images of self-love, and gay remembrances of vain opinion and popular notions. Then the spirit steps into the soberities of humble thoughts, and feels corruption chiding the forwardness of fancy, and allaying the vapour of conceit and factious opinions. Next to these, as the soul is still undressing, she takes off the roughness of her great and little angers and animosities, and receives the oil of mercies and smooth forgiveness, fair interpretations and gentle answers, designs of reconciliation and Christian atonement, at their places.—Jeremy Taylor.

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