

## TO THE CLERGY

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## A WORKHOUSE BOY WHO WROTE BOOKS.

By C. T. W.

Some ninety years ago, in a seaport town in the south of England, a boy of twelve, assisting his father in the work of a stone mason, missed his footing between the ladder and a high roof, and fell heavily to the paved court below. A group of terrified workmen gathered about the unconscious lad, and he was carried, limp and bleeding, to his humble home. One fleeting recollection of being borne along in the midst of a gaping, curious crowd lingered in his mind after his recovery, but, otherwise, the days which followed were a blank. He awoke a fortnight after, as from a "night of sleep," wonder-

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ing at the lateness of the hour, astonished at his inability to rise, and impressed by the solemn stillness around him.

John Kitto—for this was the boy's name—had learned to read, in spite of his lack of schooling; and his first inquiry was about a book loaned him by an acquaintance shortly before the accident. The answer to his question was written upon a slate, and by this means the lad first learned that his sense of hearing had been totally destroyed. Various remedies were tried, but the injury to the nerve centre proved to be permanent. In his enfeebled state there was little for him to do except read and re-read the scanty stock of books which he was able to borrow from the humble working people of his own class.

Kitto's parents were poor, and two years after the accident, the boy was sent to the workhouse by the authorities. Here he learned the trade of a shoemaker, and was later apprenticed to a man of the same craft, working, as he himself tells us, from six o'clock in the morning until ten at night. "I submitted," he says; "I acquiesced; I tried hard to be happy, but it would not do; my heart gave way, notwithstanding my manifold struggles to keep it up, and I was thoroughly miserable. Twelve hours I could have borne. I have tried it, and know that the leisure which twelve hours might have left would have satisfied me; but sixteen hours, and often eighteen hours out of the twenty-four, was more than I could bear. . . . And now that I look back upon that time, the amount of study which I did, under those circumstances, contrive to get through, amazes and confounds me."

The future of a boy, who, after sixteen or eighteen hours of exhausting manual labour, spends in study a part of the time needed for rest, is not difficult to predict. Kitto returned to the workhouse, where he remained the greater part of four years, reading the few books which came in his way, and developing by degrees the sense of sight, which was to be henceforth his chief medium of communication with the outside world. The ever-varying face of nature was a continual delight to him, and he often wandered forth upon the hills "for no other purpose than to enjoy and feed upon the emotions connected with the sense of the beautiful in nature." Pictures, too, attracted the keen, beauty-loving eye of the friendless lad from the Plymouth workhouse, and he spent hours gazing at the prints displayed in the shop windows.

One day, Mr. Harvey, a gentleman of leisure, and learning, noticed a youth of mean appearance borrowing a volume over a bookseller's counter. His curiosity was excited, inquiries were made, the story of the deaf boy's devotion to study was repeated to others, and, as a result, a subscription was taken, which enabled young Kitto to follow his literary pursuits to better advantage. Several articles from his pen appeared in the Plymouth Journal, and

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these were subsequently collected in a volume, entitled "Essays and Letters by Doctor Kitto, written in a workhouse."

With the finding of a few influential friends, Kitto began to attract a good deal of attention in the community at large. Having more time at his disposal, he advanced himself rapidly in his studies, mastered Hebrew and several other languages, and was soon able to add materially to his income by tutoring the sons of wealthy gentlemen at their homes. With this measure of success, however, Kitto was not satisfied, but still prosecuted his studies, until he became an acknowledged authority in all matters connected with biblical literature. In the boyhood of the writer of this article, Kitto's history of the Bible was exceedingly popular with all classes of readers. A more pretentious work, a Cyclopaedia of Biblical Literature, exhibits the remarkable breadth of his scholarship, and the prodigious range of his investigations.

Perhaps this meagre sketch of Dr. Kitto's early life stands for itself, but there are some things connected with it, which a boy, thoughtfully contemplating his own future, might do well to consider. He had the handicap of poverty to begin with, and was, while yet a mere child, deprived of one of the most important means of acquiring knowledge. Think of never hearing a human voice, a strain of music, a peal of laughter, a single pleasant sound! Kitto was as nearly friendless as a boy could well be, and must have had scant encouragement to persevere in his studies until he met the mathematician, Mr. Harvey. As for manual work, which, we often say, leaves us no time for books and reading, what one of us has as many hours of it as had the poor shoemaker's apprentice? Really, I fail to find a single element in the boy's surroundings, which was not a drawback.

There must have been something in the lad himself which prevailed against this combination of unfavorable circumstances. Kitto's own words, may, perhaps, help us to understand what that something was. "For many years," says he, "I had no views toward literature beyond the instruction and solace of my own mind; and under these views, and in the absence of other mental stimulants, the pursuit of it eventually became a passion which devoured all others."

We gather from this that the deaf boy in the workhouse loved knowledge for itself. He found the same satisfaction in learning that many another finds in some form of frivo-

lous amusement. He did what he did because he enjoyed doing it, and without thinking over much about the material advantage which knowledge would bring to him.

Is this love of knowledge a natural endowment, which one possesses, and ten thousand lack? Many people take this view of the matter. Personally, I am of the opinion that any intelligent boy or girl may do much to supply the defect—if, indeed, there is one—and that it is a valuable acquisition, no one is disposed to deny. So long as we regard study as a refinement of enforced drudgery, we are little likely to win large success in that direction. Even if we persevere, because we see some coveted advantage beyond, are we not missing a vast deal of the satisfaction and happiness which rightfully belongs to us? Work may be done—and no small part of the world's work is done—under the spur of necessity. Some reader of these lines may be acquiring a fair knowledge of quadratic equations and Greek roots under the Slavery system, with a practical eye to something beyond, which is quite as likely to be money as anything else. Isn't this foolishness, when the golden fleece of the whole world's quest is happiness? Isn't there some way of enjoying—really enjoying—the things which a rational being ought to enjoy?—Forward.

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