

WORKS

VOLUME I

JAMES HAMILTON

WORKS

OF THE LATE

REV. JAMES HAMILTON, D.D. F.L.S.

IN SIX VOLUMES.

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LIFE IN EARNEST.

DEDICATION

TO THE

KIRK-SESSION AND CONGREGATION OF THE NATIONAL SCOTCH
CHURCH, REGENT SQUARE.

MY DEAR FRIENDS,—In the absence of sufficient personal intercourse, I felt desirous of sending to your several homes a word in season at the opening of this year ; and, as an appropriate remembrancer at such a time, I have selected the following familiar Lectures. In printing them I thought it best to retain the homely style in which you first made their acquaintance a few Sabbaths ago.¹ Should others not like such plainness of speech, I can at least calculate on your toleration.

And here, my friends, were it not the restraining thought that colder eyes than yours may look upon these pages, there are many things I would like to say. I would like to commemorate some of the mercies which have crowned the three years and a half during which we have worshipped together ; and I would like to give you some idea of my own affection for you. To the elders for counsel never asked nor adopted in vain—to both elders and deacons for days and portions of the night devoted to labours of love, which but for their painstaking could never have been accomplished—to the self-denying teachers of the Sabbath-school and of the week-evening

¹ They were delivered as part of a Course of Lectures on the Romans, on the morning and evening of Sabbaths, Nov. 17 and 24, and Dec. 1, 1844.

class—and to all who have contributed their willing aid in various schemes of usefulness—I would tender a pastor's warmest gratitude. And I would like to mention with thanksgiving to God two things which have made my own heart often glad—the harmony of our Church, and the happiness of your abodes. Seldom does a day transpire without seeing as much in-door comfort and tranquillity—as much mutual affection of heads of families, and parents and children, and brothers and sisters—with so evident an aspect of God's blessing on many homes, as are an unspeakable delight to me. Does not God's goodness in this respect often strike yourselves, and make you sing the twenty-third psalm ?

“ My table thou hast furnished
 In presence of my foes ;
 My head thou dost with oil anoint,
 And my cup overflows.

“ Goodness and mercy all my life
 Shall surely follow me ;
 And in God's house for evermore
 My dwelling-place shall be.”

And, in some measure the result of domestic piety and peace, I here record with gratitude our congregational harmony. Sure enough we have hitherto dwelt together in unity ; and as I can truly say for my brethren, your office-bearers, that our anxiety is your edification, so has your “ order ” been our “ joy.”

But whilst the acknowledgment of God's goodness is the delightful employment of a closing year, it is no less incumbent, with an opening year, to consider what more we can do for the God of our mercies in the days to come. As a Church, we have congregational duties, and each member of the Church has personal duties. Let your minister remind you of some of these.

1. Let this new year be a year of greater *activity*. Be

diligent in your proper callings, in seeking personal improvement, and in doing good. Ply your daily employments in a Christian spirit, doing nothing by constraint or grudgingly, but adorning the doctrine of God your Saviour by your patient, sprightly, and thorough-going industry. Seek personal improvement. Give yourselves to the reading of instructive and religious books; and when friends meet let them strive to give the conversation a profitable turn, and one which may minister to the use of edifying. The Young Men's Society is an incentive to study and an outlet for the results of reading; and those young men who are desirous of mutual improvement should all be members of it. Engage in some direct effort to do good. Seek to leave the world the better for your sojourn in it. Whatever you attempt, endeavour to do it so thoroughly, and follow it up so resolutely, that the result shall be ascertained and evident. And in your attempts at usefulness, be not only conscientious but enthusiastic. Love the work. Redeem the time. Remember that the Lord is at hand.

2. Let this new year be a year of greater *liberality*. There are some objects to which of late you have given very largely; and there are those amongst you who give to every object freely, and with a self-denying generosity. But by a little systematic forethought and contrivance, begun now and carried through the year, many might double their contributions without at all abridging their real enjoyments. The maxim, "I can do without it," if all Regent Square acted on it for a single year, might build a school or send out a missionary. If all the money which your children spend on cakes and toys, and which we grown-up people spend on playthings and parties, were put into the Lord's treasury, we should have as much as we wanted for all our congregational

purposes, and a great deal over to help our neighbours. And whilst some are striving how much they can *do*, let others strive how much they can *give* to the cause of Christ this year. Those who excel in the one are likely to excel in the other: for just as those who have too little faith to give, have usually too little fervour to work; so the hardest workers are usually the largest givers.

3. Let this be a year of greater *spirituality*. As the holy Joseph Alleine wrote from Ilchester prison to his flock at Taunton, "Beloved Christians, live like yourselves; let the world see that the promises of God, and privileges of the gospel, are not empty sounds, or a mere crack. Let the heavenly cheerfulness, and the restless diligence, and the holy raisedness of your conversations, prove the reality, and excellency, and beauty of your religion to the world." Aim at an elevated life. Seek to live so near to God that you shall not be overwhelmed by those amazing sorrows which you may soon encounter, nor surprised by that decease which may come upon you in a moment, suddenly. Let prayer never be a form. Always realize it as an approach to the living God for some specific purpose; and learn to watch for the returns of prayer. Let the Word of God dwell in you richly. That sleep will be sweet and that awaking hallowed, where a text of Scripture, or a stanza of a spiritual song, imbues the last thoughts of consciousness. See that you make progress. See that when the year is closing, you have not all the evil tempers and infirmities of character which presently afflict you; but see to it that, if permitted to set up the Ebenezer of another closing year, you may be able to look back on radiant spots where you enjoyed seasons of spiritual refreshing and victories over enemies heretofore too strong for you. Happy new