

**THE DIFFICULTIES OF THE
SOUL; OR, HINDRANCES
TO BELIEVING**

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The Difficulties of the Soul; Or, Hindrances to Believing by W. Hay M. H. Aitken

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BY

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PREFACE.

THE following pages may be said to contain the results of observation and experience in evangelizing work extending over a period of many years. They are offered in the hope that they may to some little extent meet a need which is, I am persuaded, widely felt and often expressed. Many books exist which deal more or less fully with the soul's difficulties; but some of these devote only a slender portion of their contents to this subject, while others employ their whole space with the consideration of only certain parts of the whole subject. The most valuable little book of the kind that I ever remember reading, and one to which I am indebted for the idea of the method which I have adopted in the later chapters of

this book, that, namely, of introducing various difficulties in the very words in which they are frequently stated, has long since, I believe, been out of print ; and I am not able to trust to my recollection either of its title or the name of its author. Like several other less methodical books of the same kind, it was the work of a Nonconformist ; and, therefore, perhaps its excellent and sensible thoughts were scarcely clothed in a form that would have proved acceptable to most Church-people, whether lay or clerical. Other books dealing with this subject, and amongst them the very useful little work whose title I inadvertently appropriated when this treatise first appeared in the pages of the *Clergyman's Magazine*, address themselves mainly, if not exclusively, to the case of the anxious inquirer, and do not propose to offer practical suggestions to him who seeks to give help to such an one. My object, on the other hand, has been a double one : I have sought to offer the benefit of any amount of experience gained by years of evangelizing work, to my brethren in the ministry, and also

to assist those who are themselves the victims of spiritual perplexity.

With respect to the former of these objects, I have only to say that if to any of my reverend brethren I seem to have taken too much upon me, even in venturing to contemplate it, my apology must be that I am persuaded that experience is the great teacher in work of this order; and he who lays aside, at any rate for a time, the higher and perhaps more skilled labour of the pastor in order to devote himself entirely to the work of an Evangelist, is likely to have more experience of this kind than another whose work is more diversified, though certainly not less exalted. The Evangelist has much to learn from the student and from the pastor; may not student and pastor have something, at any rate, to learn from the Evangelist. I must frankly admit, that in the course of my wanderings hither and thither, I have not unfrequently been much pained by observing the apparent helplessness of some of my brethren in the ministry in dealing with

awakened souls; and this I have attributed to the fact, that amidst their many pastoral duties they have to some extent overlooked the most elementary part of their work, and have forgotten St. Paul's advice to Timothy, to "do the work of an Evangelist." If to any such these lessons learnt in the school of experience should prove of service, I shall feel that my time and labour will not have been misspent.

With respect to the other object, I can only say that I have written with the deepest feeling of sympathy for those whose case I contemplate. Yet, with a strong and sorrowful conviction of the reality of many of the difficulties to which I refer, I have also an inward persuasion, that however grave these may seem, none of them are insurmountable; but that, like the clouds which seem to line the horizon with vast mountain barriers, they only need to be resolutely approached in order to be dispersed into empty nothingness.

Very conscious of the many imperfections of my treatment of a subject as full of deep interest

as it is important, I none the less commit this little effort to help those who most of all need help into the gracious hands of the great Lord of the harvest, beseeching Him, if it be His will, to use it for His glory and for the benefit of those whose case it is designed to reach.

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