

INTRODUCTION TO THE COLLECTED ARTICLES  
"WHAT IS THE TRUTH IN ART?"

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O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things ? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things : and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things. But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned. (Matt. xii. 34-37.)

In this volume there are collected, in addition to stories which describe real occurrences, stories, traditions, saws, legends, fables, fairy-tales, such as have been composed and written for the good of children.

We have chosen such as we regard as conforming with Christ's teaching, and so regard as good and true.

Many people, and especially children, reading a history, fairy-tale, legend, fable, ask first of all : " Is what they say true ? " And frequently, when they see that what is described could not have happened, they say, " This is an idle invention and untrue."

People who judge thus judge incorrectly.

The truth is learned not by him who learns only what has been and what happens, but by him who learns what ought to be by God's will.

The truth will be written not by him who describes only what has happened and what this man and that man did, but by him who will show what people do well, that is, in accordance with God's will, and what badly, that is, contrary to God's will.

The truth is a path. Christ has said, I am the way and the truth and the life.

And so the truth is not known by him who looks at his feet, but by him who knows by the sun whither to go.

All literary productions are good and necessary, not when they describe what has been, but when they show what ought to be ; not when they tell what men did, but when they estimate what is good and what bad, - when they show to men the narrow path of God's will, which leads to life.

In order to show this path, it is impossible to describe only what happens in the world. The world abides in evil and in offences. If you are going to describe the world as it is, you will describe many lies, and in your words there will be no truth. In order that there may be any truth in what you describe, you must not write what is, but what ought to be, – to describe the truth, not of what exists, but of the kingdom of God, which is coming nearer to us, "but is not yet. For this reason there are mountains of books, in which we are told of just what has happened, or what might have happened, but these books are all lies, if those who write them do not themselves know what is good and what bad, and do not know and do not point out the one path which leads men to the kingdom of God. And there are fairy-tales, parables, fables, legends, in which something miraculous is described, something which has never happened and never could have happened, and these legends, fairy-tales, fables, are true, because they show wherein the will of God has always been, wherein is the righteousness of the kingdom of God.

There may be a book, – mid there are many, many such novels and stories in which is described how a man lives for his passions, suffers, torments others, undergoes dangers and want, and shows cunning ; struggles with others, escapes poverty, and finally unites with the object of his love, and becomes famous, rich, and happy. Such a book, even though everything described in it is as it has happened, and though there may be nothing improbable in it, will none the less be a lie and untruth, because a man who lives for himself and his passions, no matter what beautiful wife he may have, and how famous and rich he may be, cannot be happy.

And there may be a legend about how Christ and His apostles walked over the earth and went to see a rich man, and the rich man did not let Him in, and how He went to a poor widow, and she let Him in. And then He ordered a barrel full of gold to be rolled up to the rich man, and sent a wolf to the poor widow to eat up her last calf, and the widow was well off, and the rich man fared badly.

Such a story is all improbable, because nothing of what is described has happened, or could have happened ; but it is all true, because it shows what always must be, in what the good is, and in what the bad, and what a man must strive after in order to do the will of God.

No matter what miracles may be described, or what animals may speak in human fashion, or how self-flying carpets may carry people from place to place, – the legends, and parables, and fables will be true, if in them there be the righteousness of the kingdom of God. And if there be not that truth, let everything described be attested by whomsoever you please, – it will all be a lie, because it has not the righteousness of the kingdom of God, Christ Himself spoke in parables, and His parables have remained eternal truths. He only added, Observe as you hear.

