

**CHRISTIAN PERFECTION AND THE LAW
OF CONSCIENCE AS ELUCIDATED AND
ENFORCED BY DIVINES OF THE
CHURCH OF ENGLAND: TO WHICH
ARE ADDED EIGHT SERMONS**

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Christian Perfection and the Law of Conscience as Elucidated and Enforced by Divines of the Church of England: To Which Are Added Eight Sermons by D. Davies

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DIVINES OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND:
TO WHICH ARE ADDED
EIGHT SERMONS,
CHIEFLY PRACTICAL,
WITH SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES.

BY THE
REV. D. DAVIES, M.A.

SOME TIME RECTOR OF CLAYTON.



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P R E F A C E .

THE importance of cultivating what has been termed "The Higher Religious Life," is acknowledged by many who have no real desire to enter seriously on the task. At a time when infidels boldly affirm that "there is not a man or a woman in the whole of London whose practice accords with a belief in the threats and promises of the Christian religion," it ought, assuredly, to be the earnest endeavour of all true disciples of the Saviour to "let their light so shine before men that they may see their good works, and glorify their Father who is in heaven." It has often been said that the most cogent arguments in favour of our religion are to be drawn from the holy and consistent lives of its professors. If the elevated and serene piety for which some of the servants of God have

been distinguished were generally prevalent amongst us, its influence, we have reason to believe, would soon become distinctly perceptible, and the Church would assume an aspect which has not been witnessed since the apostolic age. But it is only in isolated instances that piety of a transcendent character is to be found. The doctrine of Christian Perfection, in its legitimate import, is not sufficiently understood; and the plainest texts, in which it is enunciated and enforced, are either overlooked or misinterpreted. St. Paul did not conceive that justification by faith was the whole of religion; on the contrary, in every epistle which he wrote he manifests the utmost anxiety that his brethren should aim at universal holiness, and "stand complete in all the will of God." It is evident that the apostle assigns to the Gospel a far wider range of influence, and a greater diversity of objects, than it is generally supposed to reach. "And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; that ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the *day of Christ*; being filled with the fruits of right-

eousness, which are by Jesus Christ unto the glory and praise of God.”—(Philippians i. 9-11.) Other texts, though not so full or comprehensive, teach, by implication, the same truth. The path of the just is compared to the morning light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day. St. John, in his first epistle, addresses himself to those whom he styles little children, young men, and fathers; and, according to our Lord’s representation, “there is first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear.” Important, then, as maturity in grace should ever be regarded, we are still to bear in mind that true faith, though weak and defective, “is in the sight of God of great price.” There was much imperfection at first in our Lord’s own disciples. For a long time they entertained dreams of earthly grandeur and temporal power; and, though they followed Him as the promised Messiah, yet they disputed among themselves which of them should be the greatest in His kingdom. “It was not till after His Ascension, and the descent of the Holy Ghost, that their faith appeared to real advantage, and assumed a power which it had not possessed before. It is a

great encouragement to us that we are able thus to trace the course of the apostles from first to last, to mark their progress and growth in grace. If we had not been made acquainted with their first steps, their spiritual youth as it might be called, we might at once be disheartened by the contemplation of characters so much beyond us—of excellence which might seem unapproachable. But when we watch them from stage to stage, we learn that there are degrees of grace, and that the apostles themselves had their beginning which was not without its weaknesses and imperfections.”* Many, however, there are who rest in Christian doctrines without aspiring after Christian attainments. Not that the Gospel has, in itself, any tendency to create such characters; but the corruption of men’s hearts will take occasion, from some of its doctrines, to foster sentiments which are opposed to its very nature.

A worldly and inconsistent profession of religion has ever been the bane of the Church, and its direct tendency is to confirm the infidel in his unbelief. “One great motive for Christians aiming *at the utmost perfection attainable,*” as an excellent

* BRUCE ARMSTRONG.

writer observes, "is, that nothing short of this is intelligible to the world. Till the Christian character is completed, none but an enlightened eye can understand its meaning or its excellence. It is so in many works of art and mechanical skill. However promising the preparations, or admirable the materials may be, yet till the work is finished, the uninstructed can see no use or beauty in it. In painting, in sculpture, in the construction of any complicated machine, no one can discern the skill of the artist, or the mechanician, at the commencement, or during the progress of the work, but he who is himself a proficient in the art. But when the machine is put together, or when the last finishing touch is given to the picture or the statue, then all can, in some degree, recognise a master's hand. Thus it is with the Christian character. None but the initiated can discern the grace that is in operation while the struggling penitent laments his miseries, and groans under the load which presses down his soul. These may be working out his full redemption; but these rude materials, and early promises of a better life, are *wholly lost upon the world. They know nothing*