

THE DIVINE GOVERNMENT

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The divine government by Southwood Smith

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SOUTHWOOD SMITH

**THE DIVINE
GOVERNMENT**

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DIVINE GOVERNMENT.

BY

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AUTHOR OF

"THE PHILOSOPHY OF HEALTH;" "THE COMMON NATURE OF EPIDEMICS," &c., &c.

— Beholding in the sacred light
Of his essential reason all the shapes
Of swift contingencies, all successive ties
Of action prepared through the sum
Of possible existence, he at once
Down the long series of eventful time
So fix'd the dates of being, so disposed
To every living soul of every kind,
The field of motion and the hour of rest,
That all conspir'd to his supreme design,
TO UNIVERSAL GOOD! AKENSIDE.

FIFTH EDITION.

LONDON:

N. TRÜBNER & CO., 60, PATERNOSTER ROW.

1877.

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THE FIFTH EDITION.

It has long been a matter of regret to many whose minds had been deeply impressed by the early work of the late Dr Southwood Smith, which so fully and ably entered into an investigation of the commonly received doctrine of Eternal Punishment, that this book should be suffered to continue out of print. The fourth edition was published in 1826, and was sold out many years ago without having been followed by another in this country, though four editions have since appeared in America. The want was frequently pressed on the Author, but his time and thoughts were engrossed by the work to which he had devoted himself,—the task of awakening the legislature to the importance of Sanitary Reform, and of furthering the progress of sanitary measures to the utmost of his ability, and by other literary labours, of which the preparation of the *Philosophy of Health* was the principal; the re-issue of the *Divine Government*, therefore was not accomplished.

The question, however, which he had been mainly instrumental in raising, that of the truth or falsehood of the doctrine of Eternal Punishment, did not lie dormant. During the years that have intervened since the first edition appeared in 1816, it has unceasingly agitated the minds of many thinking persons, and a great change has been worked in their views on the subject. It is under these circumstances that the friend to whom the Author bequeathed the charge of republishing the work, if it should be required, has yielded to another call for a new edition.

The first part of the book, which contains the Author's views on the great laws of the *Divine Government*, and forms an Essay complete in itself on the *Divine Goodness*, will be interesting even to those who have already arrived at settled opinions on the question of Eternal Punishment. The main object of the work is to prove that the whole human race is destined to arrive, through suffering, at a state of ultimate purity, and in the second

part are brought forward all the arguments in support of this opinion which are derived from the nature of God, the nature of Man, and the nature of Punishment. The third part is devoted to the Scripture arguments which bear on the subject. Had he revised the work it is probable the Author would have modified it in some degree.

But whatever alterations he might have made in certain portions, the main scope of his argument would have remained unaltered. The words "God is love," uttered by the Founder of Christianity, were to him living truth, and he entertained till his death the grand views that he advocated in this his earliest work, founded on his faith in the goodness of the Creator.

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TO

THE THIRD EDITION.

THE more I have contemplated the view of the Divine character and government which is exhibited in the following pages, and the more the engagements of life have brought me acquainted with the wants of the human mind in this state of discipline, and therefore of vicissitude and suffering, the more deep has become my conviction, that were the opinions which it is the object of this work to establish generally believed and considered, they would promote in an incalculable measure the virtue and happiness of mankind. This conviction coincides with that of the wisest and best men whom I have the pleasure of knowing. My sense of the importance of rendering this view of the moral government of the Deity as complete as possible, is therefore stronger than ever; and under this impression I have entered, in this edition, into a more close and connected investigation of the origin, the nature, and

the tendency of evil. I have considered, separately and in detail, the several classes of evil, namely, natural and moral evil, and the evils which have hitherto been found inseparable from the social state; namely, poverty, dependence, and servitude. I have endeavoured to show why these evils exist in the creation of a being of almighty power, of infinite wisdom, and of perfect goodness. I have endeavoured to lead the mind to the calm and serious consideration of principles which seem adequate to divest it of doubt, where doubt must be unhappiness, and to conduct it to a conclusion which, if once embraced from conviction, must secure it from misery.

I look back to the quiet and contemplative hours which were devoted to these inquiries with the feeling, not unmixed with melancholy, with which we reflect on our departed pleasures. And yet there is a closer connection than there might at first sight seem between these subjects and those which now much more exclusively occupy my attention: the real end of both is the same: for the object of each is alike to extend the knowledge, to mitigate the suffering, and to increase the happiness of mankind; and without doubt this is the great business of life: whoever succeeds in it most is the wisest, the ablest, and the happiest of his race; and even he whose measure of success is not great, cannot be without satisfaction, so long as he is conscious of the wish and the effort to accomplish more.

London: Trinity Square, March, 1822.

PREFACE.

If it be reasonable to refer the formation of the earth and of all the objects and beings on its surface to an intelligent agent, and if we cannot doubt that we are entirely dependent upon our Creator for all which we possess and hope, it must be of unspeakable importance to ascertain what his character really is; and if there be indeed reason to believe, that, in fashioning our frame, and appointing that it should undergo at a certain period a total disorganization, he do not by that change design to destroy us, but to qualify us for a higher state and for nobler pursuits, no inquiry can be so interesting as that which relates to our destiny in the ages which are before us.

Were it possible to arm ourselves against the calamities of life, as Perseus is fabled to have been armed by the gods for his far-famed expedition, he who should commence the career of existence without his helmet, falchion, and ægis, would be universally regarded as destitute of reason; but that individual is infinitely better prepared to encounter the evil with which he has to combat, who believes in the doctrine of a Providence, and knows the ground of his belief, that is, who views all events with the eye, and meets them with the feeling, of a Christian philosopher. With this belief, no combination of circumstances can make him, for any considerable period, unhappy; without it, nothing can afford him a pleasure of which Wisdom ought not to fear to participate, and with which Philosophy ought not to blush to be content.

It was under the influence of this conviction that the author of the following work commenced it with a trembling mind, afraid to undertake a task of so much magnitude and interest. But, appearing to himself to have formed a clear, consistent, and cheering view of the nature and object of the dispensations of the great Parent of mankind, and having, in the retirement of private life, been a witness, on occasions which to him were deeply impressive, of the tendency of that view to lighten the pleasure of the hour of enjoyment, and to sustain the mind in the day of sorrow, he thought that, by directing the attention of his fellow Christians to a comprehensive and connected investigation of the subject, he might possibly contribute something to the removal of their doubts, and the confirmation of their faith. If, in any degree, he have succeeded in this object, his success will ever appear to him invaluable.

In one part of the work an expression or two occur which some persons may consider strong, and perhaps uncandid, relative to doctrines which appear to him unjust, malevolent, and immoral; but he trusts the spirit which this volume breathes, will secure him from the suspicion of attributing anything of injustice, malevolence, or immorality, to the persons who maintain the opinions which he condemns. The intelligent inquirer will have made but little progress in his religious investigation, before he learns the necessity of distinguishing between rectitude of character and excellence of system; between the malignant tendency of a creed, and the benignity of the heart which embraces it. Neither justice nor charity can exist, unless this distinction be constantly kept up; and it is because it is so seldom made, that justice and charity are, among theologians, scarcely anything but a name.

The author would particularly solicit the attention of his readers, and especially of those who may be believers in the doctrine of Limited Punishment terminated by Destruction, to that part of the work in which this subject is discussed. He has there endeavoured to meet, fairly and fully, all the arguments, as far as he has been able to learn them, which are urged in support of the hypothesis. Feeling, as he does, a thorough persuasion that each is satisfactorily answered, and that, on the other hand, difficulties are stated against the doctrine, which are insuperable, he cannot but think that the reasoning which appears to his own mind so forcible, may possibly make some impression on that of the candid and patient inquirer. He is well aware, however, of the different estimate which different persons form of the force of the same arguments, and instead of cherishing a positive feeling that he is right, he is much more disposed to bear in mind the possibility of his being under those common influences by which we impose upon ourselves respecting the conclusiveness of our own reasonings, and to attend with thankfulness to any one who may do him the favour to correct any mistake into which he may have fallen.

To the friends who encouraged him to proceed with this work, as soon as they heard it was projected, the author returns his thanks; and the ardent testimony of approbation which he has received from some of them, since its publication, has excited the hope, that he has not written wholly in vain, and that these pages may, perhaps, be the means of speaking peace to the perturbed mind, and of solacing the sorrows of the mourner, when the hand which penned them is motionless, and the heart which dictated them shall have ceased to beat with human emotion.