

**VIEWS OF CHRISTIAN TRUTH,
PIETY, AND MORALITY:
SELECTED FROM THE WRITINGS
OF DR. PRIESTLEY: WITH A
MEMOIR OF HIS LIFE**

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Views of Christian Truth, Piety, and Morality: Selected from the Writings of Dr. Priestley: With a Memoir of His Life by Joseph Priestley & Henry Ware

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JOSEPH PRIESTLEY & HENRY WARE

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WITH
A MEMOIR OF HIS LIFE,
BY HENRY WARE, Jr.

CAMBRIDGE:
JAMES MUNROE AND COMPANY.
1834.

P R E F A C E.

IT is many years ago that the idea of the present publication occurred to me. In looking at some of the works of this voluminous writer, I perceived that there were many passages, now unknown, which, if collected together, would form a valuable volume of religious instruction, acceptable to devout readers and honorable to the memory of the distinguished author. Various circumstances delayed the execution of the design, and I had finally committed it to the charge of a friend who proposed to do it at his leisure. Meantime some recent abusive notices of Priestley recalled my attention to the subject, and seemed to present a fitting occasion for a work which would at once instruct and animate religious readers, and do something toward vindicating the character of an injured man; a man, who, with all his errors, and they seem to me to have been many, was yet distinguished for a pure and unalienable devotion to the cause of Christianity, a strong piety, an incorruptible love of truth, and an integrity and simplicity truly apostolic. Little as I can sympathise with many of his favorite views, I can still less sympathise with the injustice which consigns so much excellence to calumny and disgrace.

I am not insensible to the hazard which he runs who attempts to shield a name which has been abandoned to theological reproach. He is quite as likely to draw the obloquy on himself as to remove it from the

former victim. But, notwithstanding, it seems to me that true goodness ought to be honored wherever found, and that he who honors ought to be ready to vindicate it at whatever hazard. They who can admire Fenelon with all his Catholic errors, ought not to be ashamed of their admiration for Priestley with all his Protestant errors. It is not the *error*, in either case, which is admired; it is the virtue which is seen to exist in the midst of and in spite of the error. If my love of Fenelon does not cause me to be identified with his Romanism, neither ought my respect for Priestley to make me responsible for his obnoxious peculiarities. And while the beautiful writings of the Catholic Archbishop are familiarly read among us in spite of his adherence to the Pope, let the simple pages of the *English Divine*, less beautiful indeed but not less true and wholesome, find an entrance equally unprejudiced to our tables and our hearts. It is but the demand of common justice. I cannot believe that the Christian world will be deterred for ever from giving heed to it.

With these few words of explanation, I commend this humble effort to the candor of the Christian public, and the blessing of Almighty God.

H. W. JR.

Cambridge, April 26, 1834.

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MEMOIR OF DR. PRIESTLEY.

DR. PRIESTLEY was born at Fieldhead, near Leeds in Yorkshire, on the 13th of March, old style, 1733. He received impressions of religion and truth from the instructions of his mother, who died when he was seven years old. She was a sincerely religious woman, who carefully taught him the Assembly's Catechism, and was so anxious to impress on him ideas of right, that she once made him carry back to his uncle's house a pin which he had picked up when playing there with his cousins. Two years after her death, he was adopted by an aunt, Mrs. Keighly, with whom he afterwards lived as her own child, and of whom he always spoke in the most grateful terms, saying that she was truly a parent to him. She was, as his parents had been, a devoted Calvinist, though not of the most exclusive character; she maintained constant intercourse and friendship with several of the most heretical ministers in the vicinity. Thus he was brought up, as he tells us,* "with sentiments of piety, but without bigotry; and having, from his earliest years, given much attention to the subject of religion, he was as much confirmed as he well could be in the principles of Calvinism, all the books that came in his way having that tendency." His brother records of him, "At four years of age he could repeat the Assembly's Catechism without missing a word. When about six and a half, he would now and then ask me to kneel down with him while he prayed."

* *Memoirs of his own Life*, p. 7. (London, 1809).

He had an early love for learning, and made rapid progress in his studies, allowing himself very little time for recreation. Between the ages of eleven and thirteen, he read most of the works of Bunyan, as well as other writers on religion, besides the common Latin authors, and at an early age learned Hebrew, Chaldee, Syriac, and Arabic. The disposition of his mind was wholly toward divinity, and all the circumstances of his situation favored the growth of a religious character, and a disposition to religious inquiry. Before going from home to pursue his studies, he was desirous of becoming a communicant. But the elders of the church refused him, because he could not agree that "all the human race (supposing them not to have any sin of their own), were liable to the wrath of God and the pains of hell forever, on account of the sin of Adam only." Some time before this, as he relates, he had been much distressed that he could not feel a proper repentance for the sin of Adam. But he had now learned to think differently on the subject, and pursuing his inquiries became a decided Arminian.

It was the earnest desire of his aunt and other friends, that he would place himself in the Academy at Mile-end, under the care of Dr. Couder. But this he resolutely opposed; because he would there not only be required to relate his *experience*, but "to subscribe his assent to ten printed articles of the strictest Calvinistic faith, and repeat it every six months." The consequence was that he nearly lost his education; but it was at length decided that he should go to Daventry. This was in September, 1752. The three years which he spent at that institution, he always looked back upon with great satisfaction. The method of theological instruction was very free, variety of sentiment existed upon many important questions both among teachers and pupils, liberty of opinion and discussion was fully allowed, and every inquirer arrived at his results after an opportunity for a thorough and unbiassed investigation. The result in the case of young Priestley was, that he still further modified the