

**A COURSE OF SERMONS PREACHED
AT GREAT ST. MARY'S CHURCH,
BEFORE THE UNIVERSITY OF
CAMBRIDGE, DURING THE MONTH
OF JANUARY, 1830; PP. 1-110**

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A Course of Sermons Preached at Great St. Mary's Church, Before the University of Cambridge,
During the Month of January, 1830; pp. 1-110 by R. W. Evans

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UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE,

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BY THE

REV. R. W. EVANS, M.A.,

FELLOW AND TUTOR OF TRINITY COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

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SERMON I.

ON THE STUDY OF SCRIPTURE.

[Preached on the day after that of conferring degrees.]

2 TIM. ii. 15.

Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

WHEN we contemplate human life, as it actually presents itself to the great mass of mankind in their daily experience and observation, a wilderness of circumstances continually starting up unlooked for before their feet, between which, at the moment, the mind can trace no imaginable connexion, a succession of thoughts and passions suddenly brought into play by unforeseen objects, and too often scarcely influencing one the other, intermingled without rational order, exciting without permanent effect, we can scarcely wonder

at the slight dominion which has ever been exercised upon practice by any system of morals, exhibiting, as they all must, a regular chain of consequences which is never witnessed in real life, leaving unaffected that great source of action—the heart, and addressing themselves to what is comparatively so little consulted—the understanding. Nay, some may be inclined to go even further, and think that they throw the events of life, with which we come daily into close contact, to too great a distance by making them subjects of theory, and may thus lead men to speculate when they should be practising, and to think when they should be feeling. A work which should have a deep and abiding influence on real life should reflect its image, presenting that real mixture of circumstances, thoughts, and feelings, which is found to exist there, and while not neglecting the proper appeals to the understanding, holding prominently forward a noble and influential motive for the heart. And, such a work there is—the book of Holy Scripture.

In this work, it would seem as if system had been purposely avoided. The Gospels are narratives of facts, told as they occurred, which as they arrest the attention, engage also the heart, as it

were incidently, in the great stream of doctrine with which they are pervaded. The Epistles again, that great doctrinal storehouse, are occasional letters, full of continual reference to facts, and so seldom indulging in any lengthened train of argument, that we are commonly left to gather the doctrine by putting together what is there detached, and by supplying what was evidently presupposed. In order fully to understand and appreciate this character of Scripture it is sufficient to appeal to the effect of any one of those regular systems of divinity which have been drawn up from it. How cold, how formal, how comparatively unpractical they appear. Yet the doctrine is precisely the same, it is the absence of facts, and the regularity of arrangement which causes this difference. In the one, we are presented with real beings, our Lord and his Apostles move before our eyes, the doctrines come forth, as called by circumstances, from their mouths, or as illustrated in their behaviour: they are associated with facts, and thus make their impression with the solidity of substance upon the heart. We are presented not only with teachers, but with hearers. We listen to the one, we sympathize with the other. If our Saviour speak, we stand

among the train of Apostles and disciples ; if St. Paul reprove the Corinthians, we are interested in their sorrow : if he encourage the Thessalonians, we participate in their joy ; if he advise Timothy, we join with him in fearful and trembling responsibility. Every little fact related or disclosed in allusion draws us into a nearer fellowship, giving additional substance of flesh to our conceptions, awakening our social feelings, and thus opening all the channels of the heart to the reception of the doctrine. At the same time, the mind thus moved feels a lively and pleasing interest in putting together in the understanding what is exhibited thus disjoined. Whereas, in the other case, our Lord becomes almost an abstract being, the goodly train of Apostles, disciples, and assembled churches vanishes at once, all facts are excluded, we have to follow with our understanding the artificial arrangement of the compiler, and the heart has comparatively little palpable presented to it. This peculiar character of Scripture will also require peculiar qualities in its reader, which it must be the object of all Christian education to implant in others, and of every Christian student to maintain, unimpaired, in himself. It is evident that a book, so miscellaneously arranged, must,

in order to be read to due advantage, be thoroughly read. Otherwise the mind will gather inadequate, and therefore false views, by omitting some important particulars in the combinations which it forms from the detached portions. It must be read with more than common sincerity, with more than common diligence, with more than common perseverance.

It must be read with more than common sincerity: because, since a perverse and disingenuous heart can frame for itself the most accommodating views, by an omission of particulars, out of any complex question, or large body of facts, so has it especial facilities afforded it for this in Scripture, which comprehends both those cases, where it is not tied down, and compelled to follow every step, examine every point, by the chain of a systematic arrangement. And so too especially has it the will, because the real views which Scripture presents are so humbling to human pride, so full of stern rebuke to the darling propensities of man, and unfold such awful views of present responsibility and future judgement, that our corrupt nature gladly lays hold of any means of turning aside from so uninviting a contemplation. In deducing its doctrines, therefore, such a heart