

**THE CONSERVATIVE
PRINCIPLE IN
OUR LITERATURE**

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The Conservative Principle in Our Literature by William R. Williams

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WILLIAM R. WILLIAMS

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PRINCIPLE IN
OUR LITERATURE**



WILLIAM R. WILLIAMS, D. D., LL. D.

JUN 2 1907
Divinity School.

From the Society's own Press

INTRODUCTION

It is now more than fifty years since the Rev. William R. Williams, then a young New York pastor, delivered before the Literary Societies of The Hamilton Literary and Theological Institution the address on the Conservative Principle in our Literature which is here re-published. Originally intended only as a presentation to young students of some of the perils of the day which would be peculiarly apt to be met by them in their work, the address obtained on its first publication such wide currency and popularity that a second and third edition were called for within a few years of its delivery. In the preface to the first edition Dr. Williams expressed his consciousness how far the treatment of the subject fell below the intrinsic importance of the topic, and added with characteristic modesty that, had he not bound himself to publish, this consciousness would have prevented the appearance of the address in print at all; but this estimate of the writer was not endorsed by the readers.

Not only were the American editions above referred to undertaken, but an evangelical review in England published the address as the appropriate leading article in its first number, and the Scotch publisher, Nesbitt, reprinted the address, as a separate pamphlet in Edin-

burgh. It was this Scotch edition which fell into the hands of a young divinity student in Scotland then pursuing his theological course, and as he afterward stated did more than any other single book to shape his ministerial character. The years passed on and the young Scotchman was called from his native land to assume the pastorate of the Broadway Tabernacle in New York City; and when, forty years after the publication of the address, Dr. William M. Taylor (for he was the divinity student referred to) took part in the semi-centennial services which marked the termination of Dr. Williams' fifty years' pastorate in the Amity Baptist Church, he made public acknowledgment of the influence which the reading of the address here published had had upon his own character and work. How many others have been similarly influenced by this address, who shall say? Showing as it does the evidences of an early but most thorough scholarship, replete with apt and striking illustration, broad in its view of the influences which make and mold the literature of the day, it is yet more remarkable for the simple but most forcible presentation of the undying power of the Cross of Christ.

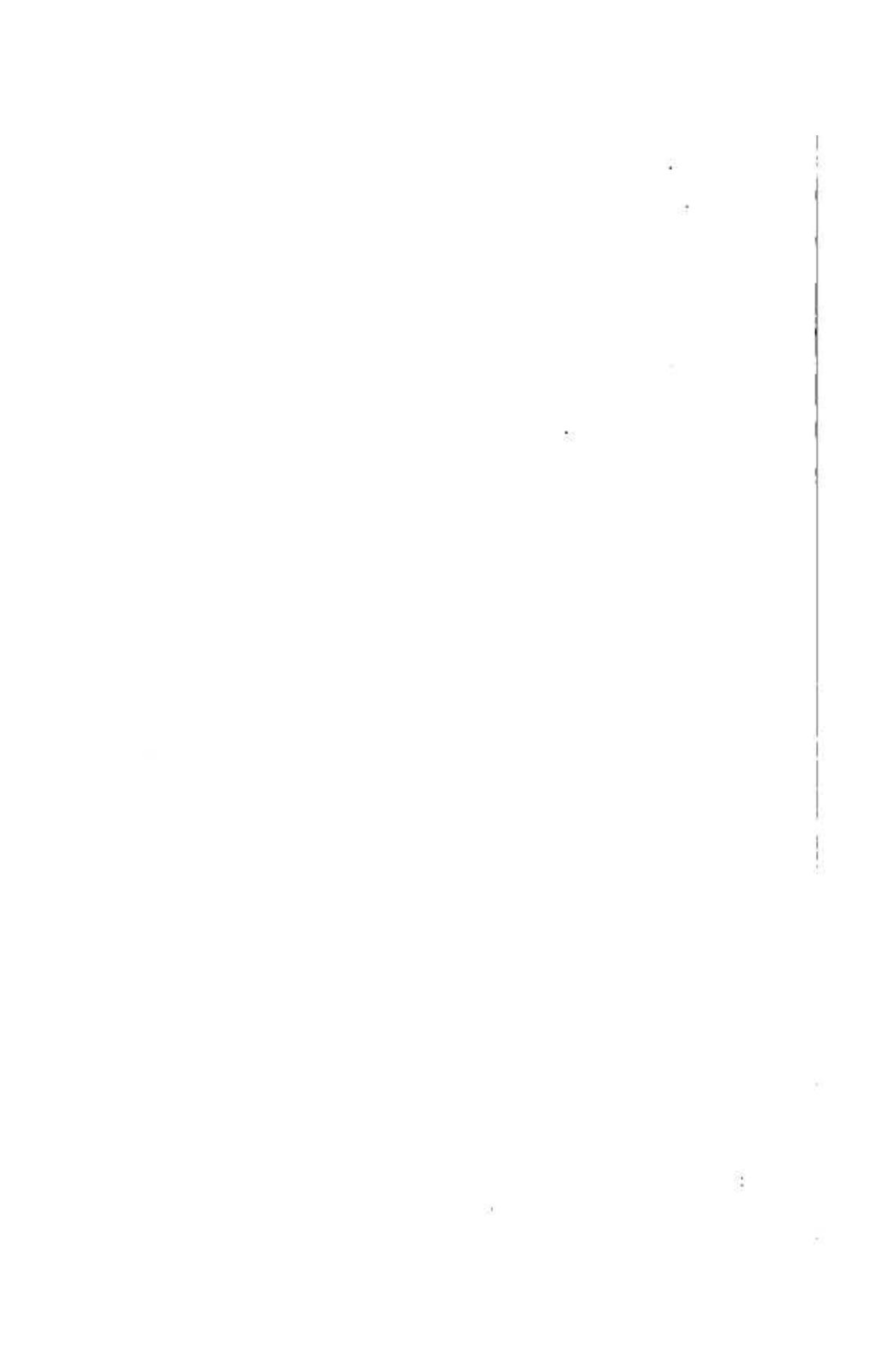
In this reprint, it has been thought best to retain the form of the address, and to omit the elaborate and scholarly notes appended to the earlier editions; that on the "Dies Iræ" has been for years quoted as perhaps the most complete and exhaustive presentation of the literary history of that ancient classic of the church. To some it may be of interest to state that the last ver-

sion of the "Dies Iræ" there presented was from the pen of Dr. Williams himself.

More than one generation has come and gone since the delivery and first publication of the address; and while manners and customs have changed with the changing generation, it is still true that the utilitarianism, the passion, the lawlessness, the false liberalism, and the superstition which the writer pointed out as the great perils of his day are to be met and overcome by the same conservative principle which was the theme and inspiration of his address. It is in the hope that new readers in a new day may find from this old address something of the strength which it brought to its earlier readers, that it is here reprinted.

NEW YORK, Jan., 1897.

MORNAY WILLIAMS.



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IN OUR

LITERATURE

GENTLEMEN : In acceding to the request with which you have honored me, and which brings me at this time before you, I have supposed that you expected it of the speaker to present some theme relating to the commonwealth of literature ; that commonwealth in which every scholar and every Christian feels naturally so strong an interest. The studies in which you have here engaged, and which in the case of some of you are soon to terminate, have taught you the value of sound learning to yourselves and its power over others. That love of country, which in the bosoms of the young burns with a flame of more than ordinary purity and intensity, gives you an additional interest in the cause of letters ; for as you well know, the literature of the nation must exercise a powerful influence on the national destiny. Acting as it does not merely on the schools, but also on the homes of a land, it must from those fountains send out its water of healing or of bitterness, of blessing or of strife, over the length and breadth of our goodly land. You know that it is not mere physical