



Fire and Ice Sermon Series

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Daniel Williams, D.D. (1667-1687)¹

Minister At Drogheda And Dublin.

By Thomas Witherow

[From his book *Historical and Literary Memorials of Presbyterianism in Ireland.*]

Discourses, in six vols. 8vo. London, 1738-1760. [M.C.D.]

Daniel Williams was born at Wrexham, the assize town of Denbighshire, in Wales, about the year 1643. He did not enjoy the advantages of a University education, but so far as it was possible he made up for the want of it by increased diligence, and was admitted a preacher before he was nineteen. The period of the Restoration in England was not favourable to Dissenters; so that when an opportunity offered to become chaplain to the Countess of Meath, he accepted it with readiness, and came to Ireland in attendance on her Ladyship. After exercising his ministry for some time at Drogheda, he received an invitation to become pastor of Wood Street, Dublin a congregation which for two centuries has had on its roll of pastors some celebrated names.

For nearly twenty years Mr. Williams laboured as a Presbyterian minister in the Irish metropolis, with acceptance and success. During his residence there, he married a lady of “distinguished piety, of an honourable family, and considerable wealth;” but this accession to his means was used with moderation, in order that he might be better able to benefit others both in life and in death. On the accession of James II. it became evident that a storm was brewing in Ireland, and the attachment of the minister of Wood Street to Protestant principles was too well known to make it safe for him to reside in Dublin. The result was, that in 1687, the year before the Revolution broke out, he resigned his congregation and removed to London. There he followed his avocation as a Dissenting minister, and exercised great influence among his brethren of the same profession. It was he

¹ The years of his ministry in Ireland.

who prevailed upon them not to vote an address to King James approving of the toleration granted them by the exercise of the king's prerogative independent of Parliament, preferring, as he said, that himself and his co-religionists should be exposed to all their former hardships, rather than that they should give any public approbation to a dispensing power destructive of the liberties of their country.

In 1688, Mr. Williams was chosen pastor of the congregation of Hand Alley, Bishopgate Street, London, where he continued to minister till the end of his life. He was the friend of Richard Baxter, and it is said that King William himself sometimes condescended to ask his opinion on Irish affairs. In 1691 he succeeded Baxter at the Pinner's Hall Lecture; but the opposition to him was so strong, owing to his known hostility to antinomianism, that, accompanied by Mr. Howe and Dr. Bates, he withdrew and set up a separate Lecture at Salter's Hall. In the religious controversies and ecclesiastical politics of the time, he always took a warm interest. In 1709, the degree of D.D. was conferred upon him by the Universities of Edinburgh and Glasgow; the latter, out of personal respect for him, enclosing its diploma in a silver box. Upon the accession of the House of Hanover, Dr. Williams was appointed by the Dissenters of London to present their address to King George I., which he did on the 28th of September, 1714. He died at the age of seventy-two, on the 26th January, 1716, and was interred in the cemetery of Bunhill Fields, where so many celebrated Dissenters are buried. There is a steel engraving of him in the second volume of Calamy's *Nonconformist's Memorial*, from the original painting in the library. Dr. Williams, having no children, left all his wealth to religious and charitable objects. He lived moderately, for the simple object that he might have the more to give to the cause of God. He founded charity schools, of which, in 1841, there were eight in existence, one in Chelmsford, and seven in his native province—the Principality of Wales. He left a sum to provide two persons to preach the Gospel to the American Indians. He instituted Bursaries in Glasgow University, for the purpose of encouraging young men to study for the ministry. He bequeathed money to the poor of Wood Street congregation, and to the French Refugees, in whom he took an interest. He directed the interest of £1000 to be devoted to the preaching of the Gospel in Irish, and appointed four persons in Wood Street and New Row congregations to administer the benefaction. The surplus of the estate was to be expended on grants to Dissenting ministers, and to the widows of Dissenting ministers generally.

The greatest foundation established under his will was the Theological Library that is called by his name. For this purpose, he purchased the books of his friend Dr. Bates in 1699, added his own to the collection, and bequeathed money

for the erection of a suitable building and the establishment of a public library for the use of Dissenters. In 1729, the institution was opened at Redcross Street, London; but in 1864, the site of this building being required for the Metropolitan Railway, a new edifice was erected in Grafton Street, in the immediate vicinity of University College, and the library was removed there in 1873. It consists of upwards of 30,000 volumes, and is peculiarly rich in the literature of the Puritan times. It is vested in trustees, thirteen ministers and ten laymen, who were originally English Presbyterians, but have long ago lapsed into Unitarianism and Socinianism. This change of religious profession on the part of the managers has not interfered with the utility of the institution; with the greatest pleasure and courtesy the trustees extend its benefits to all Dissenters, and ministers of all creeds meet there as on common ground.

The writings of Dr. Williams consist mainly of sermons and controversial pamphlets on theology. These were collected after his death, and issued in an edition of six volumes. All his publications were issued from the press after he left Ireland, during his ministry in London. When on a visit to Ireland, he preached a sermon on the 18th of July, 1700, before the Societies for the Reformation of Manners in Dublin, which was subsequently published. Though he was an Orthodox Presbyterian, and took a great interest in Presbyterian affairs, and left his whole fortune for religious, educational, and charitable purposes, mainly but not exclusively with a view to their benefit, perhaps there is none of the great Dissenting denominations which derives so little advantage from his munificent benefactions, as that religious body—Presbyterian Calvinists—to which the donor himself belonged. But the truth of God does not depend for life upon wealth and endowments.

The last words of his will are, “I beseech the blessed God, for Christ Jesus’ sake, the Head of His Church, (whom I am, and whom I serve,) that this my will may, by His blessing and power, reach its end, and be faithfully executed. Obtesting, in the name of this great and righteous God, all that be concerned, that what I design for His glory and the good of mankind, may be honestly, prudently, and diligently employed to those ends, as I have to the best of my judgment directed.” [*Life*, prefixed to Williams’ *Works*; Calamy’s *Nonconformist’s Memorial*, vol. ii., p. 640; Armstrong’s *Sketches of the Dublin Ministers*; Evans’ *Sketches of all Religions*; *Literary World*, Nov. 21, 1873.]

Meditations Of A Christian.

How indebted am I to Jesus Christ and free grace! How much indebted for what I have received, and for what greater things which I may assuredly expect! O from what misery shall I be delivered! To what happiness and honour am I to be admitted! I deserved the sorest pains which I ever felt; the curse I was once under did bind upon me not only these, but the torments of hell too. My release from endless destruction I no ways merited; but this cost my Redeemer a bitter life and a painful death after the greatest labours. He gave me some rest already, when I was wearied under guilt. How often hath He supported me under pains, sweetened them to me by His love, as well as sanctified them by His power! These are the effects of His abounding grace; but they yield greatest delight, as they are an earnest of that universal perfect rest in glory. This He is securing for me and ripening me for. O that I could esteem, love, serve, and honour my Lord, as becomes a poor sinner so vastly indebted to Him!—*Sermon on the Death of Mr. Quick; Works, ii., p. 221.*

His Calvinism.

Reader, I declare against this error [the Socinian notion of faith, and the imperfect obedience of faith, being the ground of justification], and have affirmed (1) that faith alone receives Christ and His merits; (2) that it is the righteousness of Christ alone which is the material or meritorious cause of justification; (3) that our faith, repentance, and works are not a jot of the material or meritorious righteousness, by or for which we are justified.

They say, Christ died that we might be saved if we believe. I say, Christ died that the elect should believe, and believing have life through His name.

To any one that knows the Five Points, wherein the Arminian controversy consists, I have said enough fully to acquit me. I am positive for absolute certain election; for Christ's not dying alike for all—for the elect He died to secure their actual reconciliation, for others His death is sufficient, and real offers of salvation are made to them on the terms of the Gospel, notwithstanding their being condemned by the law. Again I say, man is corrupt, and without the grace of God he cannot believe. All the elect shall be (though without violence) brought by efficacious grace to believe, and finally persevere. All which I oft assert in my book.—*Defence of Gospel Truth; Works, vol. iii., p. 339.*

Difference Between Socinians And Presbyterians.

The Socinian principles are summarily reduced to that of the Trinity, and that of Christ's satisfaction. They deny the Deity of Christ as the Son of God by eternal generation: we affirm it. They deny the personality of the Holy Ghost: we affirm it. . . . The Socinians deny that Christ died a proper sacrifice for sin: we affirm it. They deny that Christ's sufferings were the punishment of our sins: we affirm it. They deny that Christ satisfied Divine justice, or died in our place: we affirm He satisfied justice, and that Christ died in our place and in our stead; He died that we might not die who were liable to die; He gave His life for us. They say Christ died for our good, not by way of merit at all strictly: we affirm that Christ properly merited all the saving good we enjoy. The good they say Christ died for is the giving us an example of patience, confirming His doctrine, and at highest, the ratifying the covenant wherein our own faith and obedience is by acceptation accepted instead of a perfect legal righteousness, and this exclusive of Christ's satisfaction and righteousness, and that He attends to this is what they mean when they say Christ in some sort may

be said to give us life. But we affirm, that the good Christ merited is reconciliation with God, pardon of sins, and eternal glory, etc.; as well as that He gave us an example of patience, etc. And we truly affirm that we have no righteousness that answers the law but Christ's; and that Christ's righteousness is imputed to us as that wherein we stand before a just God, and is as available to us for salvation as if we had done and suffered what Christ did: and we renounce all our own obedience and works, legal and evangelical, as any part of that righteousness, in or for which we are pardoned, accepted, or glorified. —*Reply to Mr. Mather's Postscript; Works.*, vol. iv., pp. 272-3.

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