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ESSAYS^A

BY SYDNEY SMITH

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ESSAYS

FROM

THE EDINBURGH REVIEW.

DR. PARR'S SPITAL SERMON. (E. REVIEW, October, 1802.)

Spital Sermon, preached at Christ Church upon Easter Tuesday, April 15, 1800. To which are added, Notes by Samuel Parr, LL.D. Printed for J. Mawman in the Poultry. 1801. Quarto. Closely printed. Pp. 161.

WHOEVER has had the good fortune to see Dr. Parr's wig, must have observed that while it trespasses a little on the orthodox magnitude of perukes in the anterior parts, it scorns even Episcopal limits behind, and swells out into boundless convexity of frizz, the *μεγα θαννα* of barbers, and the terror of the literary world. After the manner of his wig, the Doctor has constructed his sermon, giving us a discourse of no common length, and subjoining an immeasurable mass of notes, which appear to concern every learned thing, every learned man, and almost every unlearned man since the beginning of the world.

For his text, Dr. Parr has chosen *Gal. vi. 10.* *As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good to all men, especially to those who are of the household of faith.* After a short preliminary comparison between the dangers of the selfish system, and the modern one of universal benevolence, he divides his sermon into two parts: In the first examining how far, by the constitution of human nature, and the circumstances of human life, the principles of particular and universal benevolence are compatible: In the last, commenting on the nature of the charitable institution for which he is preaching.

The former part is levelled against the doctrines of Mr. Godwin; and here Dr. Parr exposes, very strongly and happily, the folly of making universal benevolence the *immediate motive* of our actions. As we consider this, though of no very difficult execution, to be by far the best part of the sermon, we shall very willingly make some extracts from it.

"To me it appears that the modern advocates for universal philanthropy have fallen into the error charged upon those who are fascinated by a violent and extraordinary fondness for what a celebrated author calls 'some moral species.' Some men, it has been remarked, are hurried into romantic adventures, by their excessive admiration of fortitude. Others are actuated by a headstrong zeal for disseminating the true religion. Hence, while the only properties for which fortitude or zeal can be esteemed are scarcely discernible, from the enormous bulkiness to which they are swollen, the ends to which alone they can be directed usefully are overlooked or defeated; the public good is impaired rather than increased; and the claims that other virtues, equally obligatory, have to our notice, are totally disregarded. Thus, too, when any dazzling phantoms of universal philanthropy have seized our attention, the objects that formerly engaged it shrink and fade. All considerations of kindred, friends, and countrymen drop from the mind during the struggles it makes to grasp the collective interests of the species; and when the association that attached us to them has been dissolved, the notions we have formed of their comparative insignificance will, prevent them from recovering, I do not say any hold whatsoever, but that *strong and lasting* hold they