

WORDS OF THE WISE.

DR. CHALMERS ON CHRISTIAN PROGRESS.

"If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now then, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me."—(Rom. vii. 16, 17.)

It looks, I have no doubt, an apparent puzzle to the understandings of many, that a man should do what is wrong while he wills what is right; and more especially, that he all the while should be honestly grieving because of the one, and as honestly aspiring and pressing forwards, nay, making real practical advances, in the direction of the other. And yet you can surely figure to yourself the artist who, whether in painting, or in poetry, or in music, labours, yet labours in vain, to do full justice to that model of high excellence which his imagination dwells upon. He does not the things that he would, and he does the things that he would not. There is a lofty standard to which he is constantly aspiring, and even constantly approximating,—yet along the whole of this path of genius there is a perpetual sense of failure, and a humbling comparison of what has been already attained with what is yet seen in the distance before it, and a vivid acknowledgment of the great deficiency that there is between the execution of the hand and those unreached creations of the fancy that are still floating in the head. And thus an agony, and a disappointment, and a self-reproval, because of indolence, and carelessness, and aversion to the fatigues of watchful and intense study,—all mixed up, you will observe, with a towering ambition, nay, with a rapid and successful march along this walk of scholarship. How often may it be said of him that he does the things which he would not, when one slovenly line or careless touch of the pencil has escaped from him, and when he falls short of those pains and that sustained labour by which he hopes to rear a work for immortality. Yet is he making steady and sensible advances all the while. This lofty esteem of all that is great and gigantic in art is the very step, in his mind, to a lowly estimation of all that he has yet done for it; and both these together are the urgent forces by which he is carried upwards to a station among the men of renown and admirable genius who have gone before him. Now, what is true of the scholarship of art is just as true of the scholarship of religion. There is a model of unattained perfection in the eyes of his faithful devotees, even the pure, and right, and absolutely beautiful and holy law of God; and this they constantly labour to realize in their lives, and so to build up, each in his own person, a befitting inhabitant for the realms of eternity. But while they love this law, they are loaded with a weight of indolence, and carnality, and earthly affections, which cumber their ascent thitherward; and just in proportion to the delight they take in the contemplation of its heaven-born excellence, are the despondency and the shame wherewith they regard their own mean and meagre imitations of it. Yet who does not see that out of the believer's will pitching so high, and the believer's work lagging so miserably after it, there cometh that very activity which guides and guarantees his progress towards Zion,—that therefore it is that he is led to ply with greater diligence the armour which at length wins him the victory,—that the babe in Christ is cradled, as it were, in the agitation of these warring elements,—that his spiritual ambition is just the more whetted and fostered into strength by the obstacles through which it has to fight its way,—and rising from every fall with a fresh onset of help from the sanctuary, does he proceed from step to step, till he has finished the faith, till he has reached the prize of his high calling!