

COURSE XVII
Booklovers Reading Club
Hand-Book

Studies in CURRENT RELIGIOUS THOUGHT

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And Others



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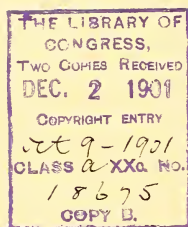
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STUDIES IN CURRENT
RELIGIOUS THOUGHT

Course *XVII*: Booklovers Reading Club

BOOKS SELECTED
FOR THIS READING COURSE

by

D^R. LYMAN ABBOTT

and

D^R. WASHINGTON GLADDEN



T h e B O O K S



*THE following three books are supplied by
The Booklovers Library to Club Members
who have enrolled for Course XVII.*

I. THE NEW EPOCH FOR FAITH

(George A. Gordon)

II. MODERN CRITICISM AND THE PREACHING OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

(George Adam Smith)

III. JESUS CHRIST AND THE SOCIAL QUESTION

(Francis Greenwood Peabody)

*The course of reading as outlined in this handbook
is based on these books. A supplementary list, recom-
mended by Dr. Lyman Abbott, will be found at the
end*—

CURRENT RELIGIOUS THOUGHT

TALKS *and* LECTURES

by

HENRY COLLIN MINTON

and

H. W. THOMAS

and

SAMUEL D. McCONNELL

and

THEODORE T. MUNGER

and

WILLIAM DeWITT HYDE

and

AMORY H. BRADFORD

*The papers by Dr. Minton, Dr. Thomas, Dr. McConnell,
Dr. Munger and Dr. Bradford have been pre-
pared especially for readers of this course.*

EDITORIAL NOTES

by

LYMAN P. POWELL

• *The Frame of Mind for*
Religious Study: A Talk
BY HENRY COLLIN MINTON

The Frame of Mind for Religious Study: A Talk

BY HENRY COLLIN MINTON

Rev. Henry Collin Minton is a native of Pennsylvania, and was graduated from Washington and Jefferson College in 1879. For seven years he held the pastorate of the First Presbyterian Church, San José, Cal., and since 1892 he has been Stuart professor of systematic theology in the San Francisco Theological Seminary. His *Christianity Supernatural*, published in 1900, strengthened the literary reputation previously acquired by his scholarly contributions to the various religious periodicals. Dr. Minton was moderator of the Presbyterian General Assembly in 1901.

In the study of current religious thought it is a matter of the greatest importance that the student be in a proper frame of mind in coming to his pursuit. Not unfrequently this frame of mind counts for more than the clear-cut convictions and positive creed which one brings to his task. Indeed, it has a very great part in determining what those convictions shall be. It is not very easy to define exactly what this frame of mind is. It has to do with the prejudices and preconceptions which one brings with him. That we all have these goes without the saying, and often to deny them in words is to prove all the more clearly to others the fact that they exist. It is a sort of mental

attitude. One may be hospitable or hostile; one may be open-minded or unapproachable. We are not now at all referring to that distinctively devotional frame which makes its possessor personally religious, but to that mental condition which the ordinary student who comes to the study of religious questions as a matter of common intelligence ought to possess. There must be a measure of sympathy with the subject. This is always indispensable to genuine progress. Renan thought that if any man is to be an impartial judge of a religion, he must once have accepted it and afterwards have renounced it. We do not believe this. Not doubt but faith, not hostility but sympathy, is a qualification in the student of any subject. A man must love Shakespeare if he is to be a good student of that master. No one ever achieved eminence in science who was not a lover of nature. There is nowhere enthusiasm without sympathy, and there is no success without enthusiasm.

In this frame of mind two extremes are possible. One is that of denying at the start the distinctively sacred elements in religion. To be sure, everything is sacred in a sense, but religion is in a peculiar sense sacred. To deny this is to annihilate religion at once. If religion is but a bare item in the vast program of nature, then we may as well take down the distinguishing signal and address ourselves to the study of natural science at once and for all. This is no special

pleading. What we are saying is that no one who comes to the study of religious literature with the idea in his mind that religion, as such, is an empty or meaningless thing can ever catch the spirit of religious thought. The scientist must surrender himself to nature's charms ; the reader must lend himself to his author's leading ; the student of religious literature must get *en rapport* with the underflowing currents of religious thought.

The other extreme is that of regarding religious spheres as intrinsically insulated from all others. It is a mistake too often made to suppose that our religious convictions are to be wholly exempt from the common tests of our believing. Religion has no franchise to violate the laws of sound thinking any more than of pure living. What is true in religion cannot be false in geology or astronomy or philosophy. There is no barbed-wire fence between the fields of religion and any other territory. All truth is one. No truth can contradict any other. If there be a contradiction, then there is falsehood at one end or the other, possibly both. Pascal said that truth on this side of the Pyrenees is error on that, and Pascal was wrong. The Creator has never authorized the prohibition to be placarded on any field he has made, "Keep off the grass." What is truth in the skies of the astronomer or in the crucibles of the chemist cannot be false at the altar of the priest or in the lecture room of theology. There

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is then no quarrel between faith and reason, between religion and philosophy.

And yet we are to remember that we cannot know all that is to be known. The higher the heights of our climbing, the broader the horizons of our knowledge which bound the wider expanses of our ignorance. Especially is this true in the high spheres of religion. Our eyesight is defective and our range is limited. The feebleness and finiteness of our faculties soon admonish us of the impossibility of compassing the wide fields which stretch in kaleidoscopic panorama before us. Intellectual humility is the lesson. Bigotry has slippery standing ground in the presence of mighty truths whose magnitude challenges and defies man's noblest powers of comprehension. Questions of origin and destiny, of the pre-conscious past and the *post mortem* future, of time and space, of eternity and God, are ever present to the thoughtful mind, and yet that mind constantly realizes that the ranges they present are larger than its powers of compassing or of measuring. *Omnia in mysterium exeunt*. This is the verdict of science, of philosophy, and of religion.

But here again we need a caution. We must not leap to the quick conclusion that because we cannot know all, therefore we cannot know anything. I may see Sirius or Orion in a crystal, unclouded, midnight sky, and yet there are a

thousand things which are true about those stars which I cannot see. A child may play on the banks of a great ocean and never dream of its vast stretches to remote shores ; it truly sees the ocean but not all of the ocean. We know really a great many things which we do not know exhaustively. When I see the old pyramid of Cheops on the banks of the Nile, I know absolutely a few things about it, but concerning the questions of its age and origin and design, I may be in utter and entire ignorance. My ignorance concerning the nine hundred and ninety-nine things does not discount my certain knowledge of the few things which I know that I know. A ton of ignorance counts nothing against a penny-weight of assured knowledge.

No man knows all about religion, but the things he does not know cannot affect what he does know. If the saint knows one thing genuinely, all the ignorance of the sage cannot upset him. Here is the golden line of distinction between humility and agnosticism, between faith and skepticism. The discerning student of current religious thought will encounter this distinction again and again. Their name is legion who have ignored it or denied it. Plato said that all philosophy is born of wonder. So, too, wonder has its place in religion. There is a world of difference, as Coleridge has told us, between a mystery and a contradiction. The

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one invites faith, the other kills it. If I could exhaustively know God, he would be smaller than my power of knowing. The divine must have in it an irreducible element of mystery to the human. Religion will cease to be religious when it ceases to be wonderful to the human mind; if all the problems of the soul were completely solved by the soul, then the soul would dismiss the ministries with the mysteries of religion. Quite to the contrary, the more fully men know God, the more devoutly they believe in him; the more the mind grasps in the supernal spheres of religious truth, the more completely is it enraptured in their heavenliness and their purity.

All this the student must bring with him; it is a part of the mental equipment with which he begins. He probably has not reasoned it out for himself, but it will be implicit in his "frame of mind." Without it he will be out of harmony with the leading, healthful currents of present-day religious thought; with it, he will be ready to catch the spirit and to estimate the tendencies which are at work in the ever-restless, ever-inviting, ever-rewarding spheres of religious literature and thought.

Ray Boccia Minton
