

**PAPERS FOR THE TIMES,
ON RELIGION, ETHICS
AND CONDUCT. VOL. I**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649667017

Papers for the Times, on Religion, Ethics and Conduct. Vol. I by Various

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VARIOUS

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"Why wilt thou defer thy good purpose from day to day? Arise and begin in this very instant and say: Now is the time for doing, now is the time for striving, now is the fit time to amend myself."

THOMAS A KEMPIS.

VOL. I.



LONDON:

E. W. ALLEN, AVE-MARIA LANE,

1879.

270 . e . 470^a

PRINTED BY GEO. W. UTER, LIVERPOOL AND ROCK FERRY.

PREFACE.

This little volume has already—in the serial form of its first publication—been subjected to some amount of public criticism and, it is satisfactory to know, has passed the ordeal, on the whole, with safety. Readers of it in that form will have discovered for themselves how far the design of its promoters, which is here briefly summed up, has been worthily fulfilled.

A mere uniformity of doctrine will by no means be found in these pages. Even direct contradiction may, here and there, be discernable. Nevertheless, a general one-ness of purpose binds the writers together—that they are seekers after Truth. Their own individual opinions on various matters are, without doubt, sufficiently definite; but they endeavour to keep their minds free from prejudice against the acceptance of any others. While deprecating to the utmost instability of judgment and protesting, with all sincerity, against expressions of crude or hasty thought, it is yet true that these writers, not only make no attempt to secure a mere consistency of doctrine one with another, but, individually, do not bind themselves by creed, article or oath always to maintain the same theory of Truth which is theirs at present. Whatever seems to them most Truth-like is to them, for the time being, most true. Free-Thought, in the best sense, is essentially "inconsistent." Truth itself is eternal and unchanging but men's discernment of it varies from age to age and from year to year. The only worthy consistency is to Truth, not to the theories concerning it.

To some, freedom of speech means little more than the right to say what one likes, and an organ of free speech is a mere miscellaneous collection of differing opinion. If every one has his say, it is supposed that, in some rough fashion, a sort of average of the whole may

be taken to represent the high water mark of Truth. The design of the present work is somewhat different. No attempt is here made to collect diverse opinions about Vaccination, the Permissive Bill or other so-called "burning" questions of the day. But each contributor, as far as in him lies, endeavours either to throw some light on UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES of life and conduct or to read the movements of the world by such knowledge of those principles as already exists. It is not by variety of doctrine but by thoroughness of investigation that any real progress can be made.

Finally, it is hoped that nowhere has that due respect which all men should have one to another been forgotten. Instead of denying, disproving or condemning, the attempt here is made to discover and affirm. The vision of Truth to man is so partial that there is no excuse for contempt for anyone's opinion. Rather, it is necessary to receive and sift whatever offers with becoming care, not for the sake of showing what a heap of dross it contains, but in order to find and save any grain of genuine metal there may be. Nor is it competent even for the wisest to declare that his brother is wrong,—at most he may only point out wherein he differs. Personal humility in the presence of man's ignorance and the infinitude of God, and an universal charity of Thought, Speech and Deed towards all men, is the right attitude for the Truth seeker.

In this spirit then, of openness to Truth, of a recognition of the supremacy of Principles over doctrine and of due respect to the thought and judgment of others, these PAPERS FOR THE TIMES are written. Though to the discerning reader, much falling short of this high standard will, in all likelihood, be only too apparent, it is hoped that, generally, the aim and purpose will be abundantly manifested.

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*STRAY THOUGHTS OF FAITH IN TRUE
RELIGION.*

STRANGE indeed would it be, if in the infinite Kosmos, we could not find an endless series of dark and unfathomable problems; but far more strange is it to see men, otherwise able, good and true, ever ready to sit in judgment on the supposed defects of natural dispensation.

The order of Nature, is to the Christian mind, the Providence of God; and while this is ever characterised by light and shade; the Christian may well in moods of faithful retrospection, chide himself for moments of faithless anxiety and distrust.

The perturbations and compensations, so admirably traced in the starry depths of infinity; are not one tittle more securely provided for, than the compensations of the moral world.

In the progress of knowledge and in the rising scale of humanity, we may make allowances for Atheistic as well as Christian excessences of thought; but no shafts of ridicule, or argumentative effort, can in any way impugn the solid realities of the Christian life; because, judged of fairly, in its essentials it is the life of mankind.

Nor would it be difficult to show, that this life is really a life of Faith.

Let us suppose that the astronomer, after tracing many perturbations, and their corresponding compensations, at length comes upon one of such extended operation, that its cycle of reaction, and resolution into the general harmony, might require a period of many thousand years. A Buchner or