

**GUESSES AT THE RIDDLE
OF EXISTENCE,
AND OTHER ESSAYS
ON KINDRED SUBJECTS**

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Guesses at the riddle of existence, and other essays on kindred subjects by Goldwin Smith

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GOLDWIN SMITH

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OTHER ESSAYS ON KINDRED SUBJECTS

BY

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PREFACE

OF the papers in this volume three have appeared before; two in the *North American Review*, one in the *Forum*, to the editors of which, respectively, the writer's thanks are due for their courtesy in permitting the republication. The writer has also once or twice drawn on previous papers of his own.

For such of the essays as have appeared in print some inquiries have been made. Those who desire to read them again are probably of the same mind as the writer, and with him believe that there is no longer any use in clinging to the untenable or in shutting our eyes to that which cannot be honestly denied. The educated world, and to a great extent the uneducated world also, has got beyond the point at which frank dealing with a traditional creed can be regarded as a wanton disturbance of faith.

Liberal theologians have at least half resigned the belief in miracles, rationalizing wherever they can and minimizing where that process fails. Liberal theologians, and even theologians by no means ranked as liberal, if they are learned and open-minded, have given up the authenticity and authority of Genesis. With these they must apparently give up the Fall, the Redemption, and the Incarnation. After this, little is left of the ecclesiastical creeds for criticism to destroy.

If there is anything which, amidst all these doubts and perplexities, our nature tells us, it is that our salvation must lie in our uncompromising allegiance to the truth. It is hoped that nothing in these pages will be found fairly open to the charge of irreverence or of want of tenderness in dealing with the creed which is still that of men who are the salt of the earth.

If much is, for the present, lost, let us remember that there is also much from which by the abandonment of dogmatic tradition we are relieved. If, on the one hand, the old arguments for theism and immortality have failed us, and the face of the Father in heaven is for

the moment veiled, on the other hand we are set free from the belief that all who go not in by the strait gate, that is, the greater part of mankind, are lost for ever; from belief in the God of Dante, with his everlasting torture-house; from belief in the God of Predestination, who arbitrarily rejects half his creatures and dooms them to eternal fire. That which in a good sermon has most practical effect will probably survive its ecclesiastical or theological form.

The spirit in which these pages are penned is not that of Agnosticism, if Agnosticism imports despair of spiritual truth, but that of free and hopeful inquiry, the way for which it is necessary to clear by removing the wreck of that upon which we can found our faith no more.

To resign untenable arguments for a belief is not to resign the belief, while a belief bound up with untenable arguments will share their fate.

Where the conclusions are, or seem to be, negative, no one will rejoice more than the writer to see the more welcome view reasserted and fresh evidence of its truth supplied.

If, as our hearts tell us, there is a Supreme Being, he cares for us; he knows our perplexities; he has his plan. If we seek truth, he will enable us in due time to find it. Whether we find it cannot matter to him; it may conceivably matter to him whether we seek it.

The reader will look for no attempt to discuss recondite questions, documentary or historical. Nothing is attempted here beyond the presentation of a plain case for a practical purpose to the ordinary reader.

It may be thought presumptuous in a layman to write on these subjects, though his interest in them is as great as that of the clergy. Would that the clergy could write with perfect freedom.

TORONTO, January, 1897.

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