

**LITERATURE & DOGMA;
AN ESSAY TOWARDS A
BETTER APPREHENSION OF
THE BIBLE**

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Literature & dogma; an essay towards a better apprehension of the Bible by Matthew Arnold

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MATTHEW ARNOLD

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LITERATURE & DOGMA

'La tendance à l'ordre ne peut-elle faire une partie essentielle de nos inclinations, de notre instinct, comme la tendance à la conservation, à la reproduction?'

SENANCOUR.

(“May not the tendency to *conduct* form an essential part of our inclinations, of our instinct, like the tendency to self-preservation, to the reproduction of the species?”)

LITERATURE & DOGMA

AN ESSAY TOWARDS

A BETTER APPREHENSION OF THE BIBLE

BY

MATTHEW ARNOLD

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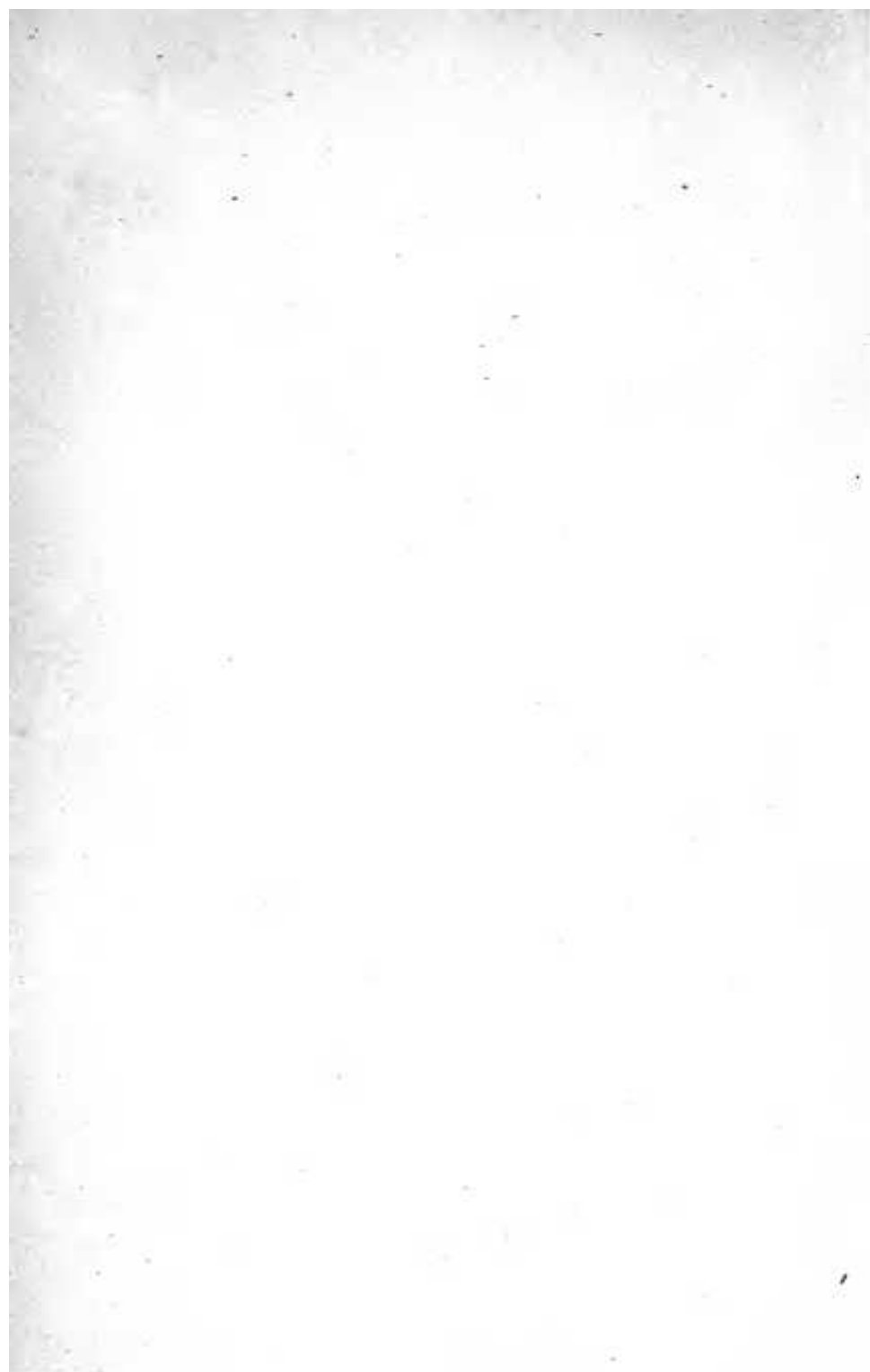
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1883

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PREFACE

TO THIS EDITION.

WHEN I praise cheap books and insist on the need for them, people turn round upon me and say, '*Physician, heal thyself!* nobody's books are dearer than your own.' Whether his books shall be cheap or not, does not depend wholly upon the author; and I might urge, besides, that in foretelling a success for cheap books, I was thinking of books by authors more popular than I am. A volume of my verse, however, at a comparatively cheap price, has been in circulation for some time, and I have long had the wish to try the experiment of bringing out one of my prose books at a price yet cheaper. That wish I fulfil by the publication of the present volume. The book chosen has been more in demand than any other of my prose writings, and it lent itself to my purpose, further, by admitting of considerable condensation. The argument of the work is more readily followed, and for the general reader it probably gains in force, by the suppression of a good deal of the apparatus of citation and illustration from Scripture which originally

accompanied it. The public to which the book was in the first instance addressed was one which expects, with a work of this kind, such an apparatus. But to the general public its fulness is not so well suited, and, for them, its reduction probably improves the book at the same time that it shortens it.

I do not, however, choose for the experiment of a popular edition this book, merely because it admits of being shortened, or because it has been much in demand. I choose it far more for the reason that I think it, of all my books in prose, the one most important (if I may say so) and most capable of being useful. Ten years ago, when it was first published, I explained my design in writing it. No one who has had experience of the inattention and random judgments of mankind will be very quick to cry out because a serious design is not fairly and fully apprehended. *Literature and Dogma*, however, has perhaps had more than its due share of misrepresentation.

The sole notion of *Literature and Dogma*, with many people, is that it is a book containing an abominable illustration, and attacking Christianity. It may be regretted that an illustration likely to be torn from its context, to be improperly used, and to give pain, should ever have been adopted. But it was not employed aggressively or bitterly; on the contrary, it was part of a plea for treating popular religion with gentleness and indulgence. Many of those who have most violently protested against the illustration resent it, no doubt, because it directs attention to that extreme licence of affirmation about God which prevails in our popular religion; and one is not the easier forgiven for direct-

ing attention to error, because one marks it as an object for indulgence. To protesters of this sort I owe no deference and make no concessions. But the illustration has given pain, I am told, in a quarter where my deference, and the deference of all who can appreciate one of the purest careers and noblest characters of our time, is indeed due; and finding that in that quarter pain has been given by the illustration, I do not hesitate to expunge it.

The illustration, then, disappears; let me add a word or two as to the notion that *Literature and Dogma* is an attack upon Christianity. It is not even an attack upon the errors of popular Christianity. Those errors are very open to attack; they are much attacked already, and in a fashion, often, which I dislike and condemn; they will certainly be attacked more and more, until they perish. But it is not the object of *Literature and Dogma* to attack them. Neither, on the other hand, is it the object of *Literature and Dogma* to contend with the enemies and deniers of Christianity, and to convince them of their error. Sooner or later, indeed, they will be convinced of it, but by other agencies and through a quite other force than mine; it is not the object of *Literature and Dogma* to confute them.

The object of *Literature and Dogma* is to re-assure those who feel attachment to Christianity, to the Bible, but who recognise the growing discredit befalling miracles and the supernatural. Such persons are to be re-assured, not by disguising or extenuating the discredit which has befallen miracles and the supernatural, but by insisting on the natural truth of Christianity. That miracles have fallen into discredit