

**A MODERN SYMPOSIUM.
SUBJECTS: THE SOUL AND
FUTURE LIFE, AND THE
INFLUENCE UPON MORALITY OF
A DECLINE IN RELIGIOUS BELIEF**

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A Modern Symposium. Subjects: The Soul and Future Life, and The Influence Upon Morality of a Decline in Religious Belief by Various

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VARIOUS

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MODERN SYMPOSIUM.

SUBJECTS:

THE SOUL AND FUTURE LIFE.

BY

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LORD BLACHFORD, HON. RODEN NOEL, LORD
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AND

THE INFLUENCE UPON MORALITY OF A DECLINE IN RELIGIOUS BELIEF.

BY

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PREFACE TO THIS EDITION.

A PROFOUND change, the signs of which are so legible that he who runs may read, but the end whereof it is hard to foresee, is coming over the religious belief of Christendom. One of the elements of this metamorphosis is a growing tendency towards logical consistency. It is becoming more and more generally seen that in religion man has but two guides, Reason and Authority; that the two are fundamentally antagonistic, but that either may be adopted without landing us in irreconcilable contradictions: in other words, that a searcher after religious truth must do one of two things—either submit himself unreservedly to the control of an Authority claiming to be divine and infallible, or follow Reason whithersoever it leads, regardless of consequences, which may be safely left to take care of themselves. The intellectual leaders of the age—the John Stuart Mills and the Herbert Spencers—are naturally found on the one side; while the submissive flocks who in all times and countries have rejoiced the hearts of all priesthoods, whether Brahmin, Buddhist, Christian, or Mohammedan, as inevitably gravitate to the other. These two opposite tendencies are evidenced, on the one hand, by a very no-

ticeable growth of Roman Catholicism and Ritualism in England and the United States ; and, on the other, by an even more remarkable spread of infidelity, and by the increasing influence of rationalistic parties within the orthodox Churches themselves. People are year by year becoming more alive to the fact that Reason and Authority are radically opposed, that the conflict between them is a life and death struggle, that an absolute choice must be made of one or the other, and that all attempts at compromise, such as that sought by Evangelical Protestantism, which in one breath proclaims the thoroughly rationalistic doctrine of the right of private judgment, and in the next seeks to fetter the free action of the human mind by confining it within the shackles of iron-clad creeds and confessions of faith, made three or four hundred years ago by fallible mortals like ourselves, are essentially irrational and doomed to inevitable failure. In the English Church the three parties are represented by the High Church, with the Ritualists at the extreme wing ; the Broad Church, or Rationalisers ; and the Low Church, or Evangelicals : or, as some irreverent wit has christened them, the Attitudinarians, the Latitudinarians, and the Platitudinarians.

The Churches of Authority, whether Roman, Ritualist, or High Anglican, and the Churches of Compromise, whether Lutheran, Low Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist, or Baptist, need no more than a passing allusion here. They are merely seeking to walk in the old paths. *Semper eadem* might be chosen as their motto by all, as it has been

by one of them. It is when we come to the other section of the religious world,—to those who, with a single eye to TRUTH, choose Reason as their guide, and follow it to its logical outcome,—that we see how vast is the change that is coming over the belief of Christendom. It is not merely that such subjects as the inspiration of the Bible, the divinity of Christ, the existence of Hell, and the doctrines of the Atonement and Eternal Damnation are being questioned with a vigour and pertinacity to which the past affords no parallel. These dogmas were questioned by Voltaire and Paine and the other Deists of the eighteenth century. The change is even more fundamental: it is, in the extremest sense, radical; so that a book which caused so great a ferment when it originally appeared as “The Age of Reason,” would, were it now published for the first time, create so little remark as almost to fall still-born from the press. Intellectual Christendom has travelled a long way since that work was written. Among the subjects now being discussed with a keenness and searching rigour unknown in former times are questions so fundamental as the existence and personality of God, and the existence and immortality of the human soul. Reason is doing its work thoroughly; it is digging down to the very foundations of religion, with the full and passionate determination that the faith of the future—be it Neo-Christianity or any other—shall be founded on a rock, not on a quicksand. The Reformation of the nineteenth century is an infinitely more portentous phenomenon than its forerunner of the sixteenth. It is no

mere reform. The question now is, whether Christianity shall continue to exist, even with such radical changes as will make it virtually a new thing; or whether it shall be replaced by an altogether new edifice built upon a scientific foundation of positive, verifiable truth.

The leading subject dealt with in this volume is one of those root questions above referred to, which lie at the bottom of all religion—the existence and immortality of the human soul. The present discussion is perhaps the noblest, as it is certainly the weightiest contribution towards the solution of the momentous question at issue that has ever appeared in print, not even excepting the immortal "Phædo" of Plato; and the numerous incidental direct or indirect allusions to it which have been made on this continent as well as in England, are proofs of the profound impression which it has created. Nor is this widespread interest a matter for wonder. To every human being who can at times lift himself above the cares and trivialities of this life, the question, "If a man die, shall he live again?" must ever be the most solemn and heart-searching. It would, of course, be absurd to pretend that "the Great Enigma" is at last solved. Probably it is insoluble; or, at least, will remain so until the alleged facts of Spiritualism are proved beyond cavil, of which there appears to be no immediate prospect; or until some "traveller" from that "undiscovered country" of which Hamlet speaks so mournfully, returns and tells us of his wanderings, and of the glories and joys, and mayhap also the sorrows, of that unknown land. But if