

**PHILLIPS BROOKS IN
BOSTON: FIVE YEARS'
EDITORIAL ESTIMATES**

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Phillips Brooks in Boston: Five Years' Editorial Estimates by M. C. Ayres

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M. C. AYRES

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PHILLIPS BROOKS IN BOSTON

FIVE YEARS' EDITORIAL ESTIMATES

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BY
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With an Introduction

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BOSTON

GEORGE H. ELLIS, 147 FRANKLIN STREET
1893

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PREFACE.

In the Prayer-Book there is a form of supplication "for all sorts and conditions of men." The editor of a daily newspaper, to be fit for his work, must constantly study, not necessarily the wishes, but the wants of those included within the entire scope of that comprehensive prayer. It was my deep certainty that Phillips Brooks was the one man in this day and generation who could best meet the religious needs of all sorts and conditions of men which led me to undertake, five years ago, the task of pointing out to the miscellaneous public, through the editorial columns of the *Advertiser*, certain characteristics of Boston's greatest preacher, and to pursue this plan systematically from year to year. There were reasons why it seemed that in some respects a "secular" journal would be a better medium than any other.

There are five conditions or tendencies which mark the attitude of large classes of people toward the Christian Church at the present time. First, there is profound discontent with regard to the lack of church unity. Second, there is a vast though as yet largely vague movement along lines of new theological thinking. Third, the thing that, for want of a better term, is called agnosticism, has a

powerful hold upon many educated minds and upon many more minds that wish to be thought educated. Fourth, a still more deadly danger to religion comes from a condition which is neither hostility nor uncertainty, but simply indifference. Fifth, the intellectual and material tendencies of the time are so smothering men's spiritual nature that the word "goodness," whether in its religious or moral meaning,—though in very truth this is a distinction without a difference,—has come to signify, to multitudes of understandings, something which outwardly is "damned with faint praise," while inwardly it is despised.

With respect to each and all of these current facts, I thought it worth while to put forth even such humble and feeble efforts as I could with a view to bringing yet more widely to bear the influence of Phillips Brooks in teaching clergymen how to preach and laymen how to listen. The hope that Christian unity is to be obtained by inducing all the separate sects to come over and join some one sect is chimerical to the last degree, and growing more evidently so every day. But "the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace" is more nearly possible to-day than it has been before for a thousand years. When that is perfected, a mighty stride will have been taken toward the answer to the prayer of Jesus, "That they all may be one." I heard the rector of Trinity Church say, once, that birds, flying through the air, are not troubled how to cross our rivers. It was by lifting our conception of what the Church really is into a region far above denominational boundaries that he showed us how little need there is for such separations.

He was in profound sympathy with what is called the new theology; but he attached far more importance to its spirit than to its letter. It meant with him, not so much a new set of doctrines as a new, a broader, freer, and more spiritual use of all doctrine, so that the most conservative and the most progressive believers found their souls fed in listening to him. Though he never preached for the sake of winning theological converts, many prejudices against advanced opinions were removed by the discovery that the religious uses for which outworn dogmas are valued can be found in connection with the fresher, more rational thought of the modern era. He taught the Church how to hold on to the past, while gladly welcoming the present and the future.

He disarmed scepticism by presenting religious faith in its simplicity, sufficiency, and sublimity. He did not demand less belief than man had before been called upon to grant, but more; yet the old antagonism between reason and revelation disappeared, because he made men see that the essence of revelation is in the outreach of the divine mind to the human. Dr. Brooks overcame indifference to religious concerns by two methods. He entered into all sorts and conditions of human life with such subtle insight and imaginative sympathy that people realized for the first time that religion had something to give which they had been craving without knowing what or why; and he revealed to this humdrum, workaday world of ours the glory of the commonplace. What Macaulay said of Lord Bacon could be said, with a slight verbal change, of Bishop Brooks. He preached about things in which

everybody was interested, in language which everybody understood.

It is requisite, but it is not easy, to touch upon that quality in him which was, after all, the most precious, peculiar, and wonderful. It is not easy, because the theme seems almost too sacred for words. That which most impressed the people whose privilege it was to know him nearly—and that inestimable privilege was freely bestowed upon the high and lowly, rich and poor, learned and unlearned, old and young, religious and irreligious—was not his greatness, though no one could escape the sense of the man's tremendous intellectual power. It was not his extraordinary eloquence. It was not his fine culture, his varied knowledge, his indescribable keenness and brilliancy, or the charm and magnetism of his personal presence. The thing that seemed supreme in Phillips Brooks was his goodness. I have said that the word "goodness" has come to be despised. Who can deny that this is so? We hear it used as the antithesis of greatness. We hear it pronounced with a circumflex inflection. The idea prevails that goodness is admirable in children, quite appropriate in women, characteristic of childlike and feminine men, but out of place in men of the world. The fault is partly chargeable to certain tendencies of the age in which we live, but more to the false definition that good people, by precept and example, have given the word. Bishop Brooks did this crowning service, that he made goodness mean the grandest thing of which humanity can conceive. His was no such goodness as we attach in thought to those whose names figure in the saints' calen-