

**OXFORD HOUSE PAPERS:  
A SERIES OF PAPERS FOR  
WORKING MEN**

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**OXFORD HOUSE PAPERS:  
A SERIES OF PAPERS FOR  
WORKING MEN**



# OXFORD HOUSE PAPERS

*A Series of Papers for Working Men, written by  
Members of the University of Oxford*

"The Truth shall make you free"

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*FIRST SERIES*



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## Difficulties about Christianity no Reason for disbelieving it.

THERE is much talk nowadays about difficulties in religion. Different people treat them in different ways ; some as a means of attacking religion ; some as a cause of anxiety and fear lest, after all, religion should not be true. But in this they agree,<sup>1</sup> that both think that difficulties are against the truth of religion ; or, which is the same thing, that if religion were true there would be no difficulties in

<sup>1</sup> Doubtless there are some who have never felt difficulties. This may be either because what is true and good in religion has filled their minds so much as to leave no room for other thoughts, or because education and habit have made things seem easy and familiar to them which would be hard to one who came to them for the first time, or because they are ignorant of the questions which are raised. In any case, they may and must be asked not to make their own freedom into a tyranny for others. If they treat with contempt others who have difficulties, they are certainly wrong, for there *are* difficulties, as the greatest Christian minds have admitted, and they will do harm to those who, whatever others may say, do feel the difficulties, and can only be helped by being shown that they are no real objection to a reasonable faith.

it. Now it is just this which we have to challenge ; and to maintain, on the contrary, that *true religion is sure to have difficulties.*

This does not mean that "the more difficulties the better ;" or that Christians do not mind how much the argument goes against them, and believe in spite of their reason. Of course difficulties must be considered and fairly met, and each difficulty counts for something, at least at first sight, in an argument against religion ; and difficulties many enough or great enough would serve to crush religion. But, side by side with this, it is true, as shall be shown, that there *must* be difficulties about religion, so that a certain amount of difficulty of certain kinds need not encourage the enemies of religion nor disturb its friends.

"There must be difficulties about religion." Let us only try to imagine the contrary. Let us suppose some one coming to us with a religion which had no difficulties. He must tell us all about God, so that nothing shall remain unexplained, and all about God's ways of working, so that they may lie spread before us just as a man's work might. He must know all that we can ask about death and another world ; he must be able to tell us, without any hesitation or any uncertainty, what is right, *i.e.* God's Will, in every case. Now, what should we think of a man who came profess-

ing all this, this religion without difficulties? Probably we should feel disgust. And we should feel this disgust because there is nothing more offensive than to be "cock-sure," to have a pat answer on the biggest matters that the mind can think of; because there is absurdity in thinking that they do not pass the understanding of such beings as ourselves; and because it would be a new world altogether, and not the world God made for man, if true and false, right and wrong, were always as plain and distinct as north and south on a compass.

Does it not, then, already seem that our own judgment goes against a "religion without difficulties?" We should think the man who brought it a simpleton or an impostor.

But let us see a little more closely why we should be right in this feeling.

I. First, and before all else, religion gives a knowledge of God. If it is a religion made by men, it contains what men think they know of God out of their own minds, or from what they have seen in the world around them. If it is a "revealed" religion, like Christianity, it claims to contain what men believe that God has taught them about Himself. Either way it gives a knowledge of God. But now, according to nineteenth-century ideas, if there is a God at all, what do we all agree that He