

**AGNOSTICISM & THEISM IN  
THE NINETEENTH CENTURY.  
AN HISTORICAL STUDY OF  
RELIGIOUS THOUGHT**

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Agnosticism & Theism in the Nineteenth Century. An Historical Study of Religious Thought by  
Richard A. Armstrong

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**RICHARD A. ARMSTRONG**

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# **Agnosticism & Theism**

## **in the Nineteenth Century**

AN HISTORICAL STUDY OF RELIGIOUS THOUGHT

**Six Lectures**

*class* BY  
RICHARD A. ARMSTRONG, B.A.

WITH AN INTRODUCTORY NOTE BY  
PHILIP H. WICKSTEED, M.A.

**London**

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## PREFACE

THE Lectures contained in this volume represent the last of Richard Armstrong's contributions to the chosen subject of his thought and study. They were prepared for popular audiences, and had been received at Nottingham and Northampton, the only places in which they were delivered, with an interest that gave promise of far reaching usefulness and influence. It was felt that they displayed in a high degree all the best characteristics of Mr. Armstrong's expositions. They are indeed models of lucidity, candour, and sincerity, and in the largeness and generosity of their appreciation and sympathy they show that Mr. Armstrong's mind was deepening and mellowing as well as strengthening up to the very end.

His death has disappointed the hopes of many expectant audiences ; but it was impossible to allow utterances of such weight to be withheld from the public and (with a single exception) the manuscript was so complete as to render the task of preparing it for the press a light one. The second part of the third lecture, indeed, has not been reduced to a form that admitted of its publication ; and a note will be found in the proper place explaining the course that

## PREFACE

has been adopted in regard to it ; but in all other respects the modifications that the editor has allowed himself to introduce into the manuscript are few and slight and do not in the smallest degree affect the argument. The whole scheme of the lectures is laid before the reader exactly as it was planned and executed by Mr. Armstrong, but it must be borne in mind that he had had no opportunity of revising the lectures, or considering suggestions that had been made, by one at least of his hearers. Careful notes of reference show how scrupulously these would have been weighed had Mr. Armstrong's life been prolonged.

P. H. W.

Childrey, May 5, 1905.



'For much of the Agnosticism of the age, the Gnosticism of the theologians is undeniably responsible. They have inconsiderately overstrained the language of religion till its meaning breaks: and the coherent thinker easily picks up its ruins to show that they can contain nothing.'—James Martineau, *Study of Religion, Preface, p. xi.*

# Agnosticism and Theism in the Nineteenth Century

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## LECTURE I

INTELLECTUAL INFLUENCES OF THE FIRST HALF  
CENTURY : SHELLEY, WORDSWORTH, JOHN  
STUART MILL, AND THOMAS CARLYLE

IT is clear that we have before us in the title of these Lectures a subject of dimensions which must defy adequate treatment in six addresses of a single hour each. Let us then begin our voyage by throwing excessive cargo overboard, and limit ourselves to such measure of merchandise as we may reasonably hope, with favourable breezes, safely to steer to port. Our theme is Agnosticism and Theism in the Nineteenth Century. But I propose to confine our study to such writers as have brought a direct influence to bear on

English thought, and those all of them such as have written in our English mother-tongue, be they English, Scottish, or American. Nor shall we deal with such as have made their appeal chiefly to philosophers and theologians, but only those who have written largely for the general public, the vast mass who are neither specialists nor scholars, but simply thoughtful Englishmen, who care much whether we can know anything of the tremendous problems of God and Man and the Universe. And we shall chiefly deal with the second half of the century. There have been certain writers who stand out conspicuous in influence on the last two generations of our countrymen. Of these we shall have to speak.

In the main, then, we shall be concerned with writers who have lived within the memory of the older ones amongst us now; and to some of us the names which will come in for much handling will call up memories of very keen debate and agitations of the public mind. Huxley and Tyndall, for instance: what scenes of battle do their names recall! It seems worth while to try to catch and fix