SCEPTICISM AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

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SECOND AND ENLARGED EDITION.

WILLIAMS AND NORGATE,
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1877.

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION.

The still unsettled state of the controversy between Orthodoxy and Scepticism, and the social repression maintained by the upholders of the former over those who are guided by the latter, has induced the author to make a further attempt to excite such an interest in the matter as may result in equal justice being rendered to both parties.

Remarks on the course pursued by the clergy have been found necessary, but should the author's words be construed as imputing to them any improper motives, he most distinctly repudiates any intention of the kind. Error of judgment is all he attributes to them.

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PART I.

THE time seems clearly to have arrived when something should be settled regarding the two parties now admitted to exist—one upholding the inspiration of the Old and New Testaments, and the other denying it—as to the position which each party is entitled to hold, and the social rights and interests that each may claim in the State. Much difficulty will arise before the matter can be properly adjusted; but the necessity for it has become obvious, if justice to both parties alike is to be observed.

The case, as it stands, may be briefly stated as follows: Up to a certain period, we have been historically taught that the writings known as the Holy Scriptures were—the Old Testament by

the Jews, and the Old and New Testaments by Christians—received as having emanated by inspiration from the supernatural power, named and described in both Testaments as God; and this teaching was almost universally acquiesced in throughout the Christian world. In this matter, indeed, until a comparatively late period, there was little option allowed, for so severe were the laws against all negative teaching on the subject that no open questioning of the inspiration of these writings could take place without risk of awful punishments, which varied in intensity, according to the ignorance and barbarity existing in different countries, and the tyranny over opinion practised, I regret to add, generally at the instigation of the clergy of all persuasions.

It is difficult to ascertain the time when scepticism, as it has been understood in modern times, first began to make its appearance in the world; but perhaps its seeds may be traced in the declarations of freedom of thought and opinion which were embodied in the protestations against mere authority,

with claims for the right of private judgment, made by Luther and Melancthon, and their disciples, in the sixteenth century, and Luther's first direct opposition to the Papal doctrines and authority was made in 1517. As far back, however, as 1624, Lord Herbert of Cherbury published views of a deistical tendency, and he was followed by others, both in this and foreign countries, amongst whom may be named Hobbes and Tindal, in the seventeenth century, and the third Earl of Shaftesbury, Lord Bolingbroke, and Collins in the early part of the eighteenth century; a later period of which brought forth the works of Hume, Adam Smith, Lord Chatham, Gibbon, and Franklin. The arguments of all these writers tended to impugn the notion that the Old and New Testaments were written under inspiration; but, as my knowledge of their writings is chiefly confined to what I have learnt from encyclopædias and other works referring to them, I cannot enter into any precise exposition of the views promulgated by these authors. There can be little doubt, however, of their having published opinions of a strong scep-