

**THE RELIGIOUS DEMANDS OF THE
AGE: A REPRINT OF THE PREFACE
TO THE LONDON EDITION OF THE
COLLECTED WORKS OF
THEODORE PARKER**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649332366

The Religious Demands of the Age: A Reprint of the Preface to the London Edition of the collected works of theodore parker by Frances Power Cobbe

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Cover @ 2017

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FRANCES POWER COBBE

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THE
RELIGIOUS DEMANDS OF THE AGE:

A Reprint of the Preface

TO THE

LONDON EDITION OF THE COLLECTED WORKS
OF THEODORE PARKER.

By FRANCES POWER COBBE.

BOSTON:
WALKER, WISE, AND COMPANY,
246, WASHINGTON STREET.
1863.

Phil 8582.35.15

19116

HARVARD COLLEGE LIBRARY

1848

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Cambridge

BOSTON:

PRINTED BY JOHN WILSON AND SON,

4, WATER STREET.

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The Collected Works
OF
THEODORE PARKER.

IN TEN OR TWELVE VOLUMES, 8VO:

VOLUME.

- I. THE DISCOURSE OF RELIGION.
- II. TEN SERMONS, AND PRAYERS.
- III. THEOLOGICAL DISCOURSES.
- IV. POLITICAL DISCOURSES.
- V. ANTISLAVERY DISCOURSES.
- VI. SOCIAL-SCIENCE DISCOURSES.
- VII. CRITICAL AND MISCELLANEOUS WRITINGS.
- VIII. CRITICAL AND MISCELLANEOUS WRITINGS.
- IX. THEISM, ATHEISM, AND THE POPULAR THEOLOGY.
- X. AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL PIECES.
- XI. AND XII. LIFE AND CORRESPONDENCE.

"It is perhaps God's will that we should be taught in this our day, among other precious lessons, not to build up our faith upon a book, though it be the Bible itself; but to realize more truly the blessedness of knowing that He Himself, the living God, our Father and Friend, is nearer and closer to us than any book can be; that his voice within the heart may be heard continually by the obedient child that listens for it; and that *that* shall be our Teacher and Guide in the path of duty, which *is* the path of life, when all other helpers — even the words of the best of books — may fail us." — *The Pentateuch critically examined by the Right Rev. J. W. Colenso, D.D., Bishop of Natal.*

THE
RELIGIOUS DEMANDS OF THE AGE.

A PREFACE

TO THE
COLLECTED WORKS OF THEODORE PARKER.

THE progress of religious belief, from a less to a more enlightened stage, is carried on apparently by a series of waves of thought, which sweep over the minds of men at distant intervals. There are periods of comparative calm and stagnation, and then times of gradual swelling and upheaving of the deep, till some great billow slowly rears its crest above the surface, higher and still higher to the last; when, with a mighty convulsion, amid foam and spray, and "noise of many waters," it topples over, and bursts in thunder up the beach, bearing the flood-line higher than it had ever reached before. A great national reformation has been accomplished.

In the eyes of those who have watched intelligently the signs of the times, it seems that some

such wave as this is even now gathering beneath us, a broader and a deeper wave than yet has ever arisen. No partial and temporary rippling of the surface is it now; but the whole mass of living thought seems slowly and steadily upheaved, and the ocean is moved to its depths. Such a phenomenon, if true, bears the highest promise ever held out to humanity; and we cannot but hail it with faith and joy, conscious that the sudden uprising of even the purest reforming sect, carrying us forward for the moment with earthquake violence, would afford no such reason for hopeful confidence in the future.

But this universal upheaving of thought, along with its vast promise of good, brings with it also forebodings of changes which it is impossible to contemplate without grave anxiety. When *this* wave breaks, if break it will, it will reach a point which has never been disturbed hitherto, and in whose conservation or ingulfment some of the most sacred interests of the human race are concerned. The old temple of Traditional Religion—the religion which rests primarily on external evidence of certain supernatural events—stands front to front with the advancing waters, and needs must bear the whole force of their incalculable weight. Already the venerable fane in which our fathers worshipped so long seems menaced

with destruction, while one after another its bulwarks and corner-stones are sapped and submerged, and the sands on which it is built are shifting on every side. In the judgment of many, its doom seems inevitable, unless not merely some partial lull and subsidence of the waves takes place, but the whole tide of human thought for ages turns back, and sets in an opposite direction.

These solemn forebodings are not unnaturally scorned by those whose trust in the old creed has remained hitherto undisturbed. Every man's peculiar church must needs be to *his* mind "founded on a rock," and impregnable to "the gates of hell." But to others, equally naturally the creed they have themselves found untenable seems sure to prove in the end untenable to all who bring to its examination equal freedom and earnestness; and they note how, as years go on, every advance in philosophy and every discovery in science seems to bear in one and the same direction. Looking back over a few decades, the change in the state of all controversies on religion becomes remarkable; and the wild raids of professed "infidels" and timid attacks of latitudinarians in past times were found to be superseded by an orderly and resolute invasion, all the more formidable that the hostile bands approach from the most opposite quarters. It seems to be but a question .