

**AN INQUIRY INTO THE TRUTH OF  
DOGMATIC CHRISTIANITY,  
COMPRISING A DISCUSSION  
WITH A BISHOP OF THE ROMAN  
CATHOLIC CHURCH**

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An inquiry into the truth of dogmatic Christianity, comprising a discussion with a bishop of the Roman Catholic church by William Dearing Harden

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**WILLIAM DEARING HARDEN**

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AN INQUIRY INTO  
THE TRUTH OF DOGMATIC  
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THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

BY  
WILLIAM DEARING HARDEN

"It is obvious that the most indispensable requisite in regard to Religion is that it should be true. No specious hopes or flattering promises can have the slightest value unless they be genuine and based upon substantial realities. Fear of the results of investigation, therefore, should deter no man, for the issue in any case is gain: emancipation from delusion, or increase of assurance. It is poor honor to sequester a creed from healthy handling, or to shrink from the serious examination of its doctrines. That which is true in Religion cannot be shaken; that which is false no one can desire to preserve."—*Supernatural Religion*, Preface to First Edition.

"It is absurd to assume what is beyond reason to account for what is opposed to reason."—*Ibid.*, Part I., Chapter 3, Sec. 2.

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### TO MY CHILDREN

for whose advantage even more than for my own this Search for Truth has been prosecuted, so much of this volume as I can fairly claim as my own, and therefore subject to such disposition, is most affectionately inscribed; with the earnest, soul-full prayer that, if there be error in my views, the conviction of it may be brought to my mind before it can possibly affect theirs.

W. D. H.



## PREFACE.

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SOME time ago, for reasons of no interest to the public, I engaged in a friendly controversy on religious topics, running in a rather desultory way through several years, with a Bishop (since Archbishop) of the Roman Catholic Church. A mass of arguments on both sides of the question was thus accumulated, and friends, who think they have been benefited by reading the discussion, have urged its publication.

Thinking that it may reach and benefit some who would be deterred from undertaking an examination of the subject if the argument had assumed a more learned and profound shape; believing that the fact of its being an actual discussion, in which the side of orthodoxy is represented by a learned Bishop of her strongest Church, would lend an additional interest to the argument; knowing that it is a great advantage, in a search for truth, to have the argument on the one side directly contrasted with the argument on the other, the weakness of the one adding to the strength of the other; and, more than all, because the argument is in a form that can be understood without any previous theological education, and is therefore the better adapted to the ordinary lay reader, and every new argument, or new statement of an old argument, may convince some who had not been convinced



before,—I have consented to give the discussion to the public.

In its original form the correspondence (which it is proper to state was probably written by both, certainly by me, without any idea of any future publication) contained much of a purely personal nature, and the argument was necessarily somewhat disjointed, each paper discussing a variety of subjects. I have therefore thought it best to re-arrange it so as to omit that which was purely personal and not pertinent to the argument, and to give it a more connected form, putting together all the correspondence on each subject and arranging the points in what seems a more natural sequence.

Further than this I have not interfered with the Bishop's presentation of his views. I have had no disposition to set up any specious or pretended arguments in order to refute them; I am too much in earnest for that. I did not even seek an inexperienced or unlearned layman with whom to discuss for the sake of confounding; but, on the contrary, I sought the most distinguished and learned Prelate within my reach, and if he has replied to, without answering, my arguments, it may be safely assumed that it is because they are unanswerable.

The correspondence was a real one,<sup>1</sup> and I have the right to use the Bishop's argument, which I think covers pretty much all that can be said for his Church, and I use it in his own words.

In my own argument I have dropped the epistolary form, and address myself directly to the reader.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The original is in the hands of the Publishers.

<sup>2</sup> The choice was before me to use the material for the purpose of writing a book, in which the entire argument on both sides would be in my own words—which might give the orthodox, if they felt themselves worsted, the

If there is any argument, other than those herein discussed, that can be urged against my views; any argument which does not depend upon the point at issue for one of its premises; any argument which is sustained by fact rather than by mere assertion, and which appeals to reason, and not alone to faith; any argument not entirely based on the authority of a doubtful scripture, or a still more doubtful tradition,—I will be more than pleased to hear it, come from what source it may, and will answer or yield.

But otherwise further discussion would, I fear, be but time wasted.

It is a fundamental principle of science that a theory is exploded whenever a single fact is produced, within the range of its application, which it does not explain or account for; the variance of fact and theory is always fatal to theory. I do not see why the same principle may not be applied to theology. So, if there be a single point in my argument which the Church cannot meet, the Church must go to the wall; not that I expect to be the means of accomplishing what so many abler and better men have failed to compass—the death of superstition. I know human nature too well for that; but I do hope to satisfy some of my readers that the dogmas of the Church are

chance to say that I had used only such arguments in behalf of the Church as I thought I could answer, leaving out the strongest, or emasculating them by my method of statement; or to give the correspondence substantially as it stood, with all its imperfections on both sides. I have chosen the latter course as being fairer to my opponent, and decidedly more interesting to the public, who might be attracted by the unusual fact of an actual controversy, and would not be repelled by finding itself entrapped into a dry and technical theological dissertation; and I might thus reach the people whom I sought above all others—those who, not realizing its importance, were not disposed to give much time or thought to the subject,

devised rather for its own perpetuation than their salvation; and if I shall succeed in bringing even one human soul from darkness into light—from superstition and death to freedom and life—I will not have thought and worked in vain.