

**INSTITUTE ESSAYS
READ BEFORE THE
"MINISTERS' INSTITUTE"**

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Institute Essays Read Before The "Ministers' Institute" by Henry W. Bellows

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HENRY W. BELLOWS

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READ BEFORE THE

"MINISTERS' INSTITUTE,"

Providence, R.I., October, 1879.

WITH AN

INTRODUCTION

BY
Whitney
REV. HENRY W. BELLOWS, D.D.

BOSTON:

SOCIETY FOR PROMOTING CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE, PIETY, AND CHARITY.

1880.

PUBLISHER'S NOTE.

THE publisher regrets the long but unavoidable delay in giving this volume to the public. But the intrinsic value of the Institute Essays, independent of the special occasion where they were first presented, as it is the only excuse for putting them in any permanent form, must warrant their republication, even at this late date.

While all the essays, with one exception, have been revised by the authors, special attention may, without invidious distinction, be called to Professor Ezra Abbot's remarkable discussion of the External Evidences of the Authorship of the Fourth Gospel. The paper originally read before the Institute has since been expanded and elaborated, until it now stands as a complete treatise on a subject of the profoundest interest to all Bible students.



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INTRODUCTION.

"THE MINISTERS' INSTITUTE" is an association of Unitarian and other ministers willing to work with them for the promotion of critical and independent studies in theology and religion. It was founded in 1876, and has had only two sessions. Its method is to assign, through a committee, to the best scholars, whether within or without its ranks, whose services it can obtain, such subjects as most require critical and learned treatment, and to give the writers at least a year's time to prepare their papers. A session of four days is held every other year, at some central and accessible place, at which these papers are read and discussed. Hitherto about one hundred and fifty ministers have been in attendance as members, and many others of various ecclesiastical connections as hearers. There are usually eight papers read; and an effort is made to have each important subject treated by two scholars known to incline to opposite sides of the question. Each day is thus given up to some one theme, on all sides of which light is thrown,—first by experts, and then by open discussion.

The present volume speaks for itself. It is a collection of the papers read at Providence, R.I., in October last, at the second session of the Institute. These papers were quite fully reported in the *Christian Register* of November first; but they are now printed from the original manuscripts, with the exception of one paper,—Rev. J. B. Harrison's,—which

could not be procured. They are published at the earnest request of many of those who not only heard them, but have read them in newspaper form, and wish to have them in a shape more convenient for reconsideration and preservation.

The business agent of the *Christian Register* has generously assumed the risk of the volume; and the least I can do, to show my sense of the value and credit of his enterprise, is to comply with his request to furnish a brief introduction.

The object of the Ministers' Institute, as may be inferred from the account already given, is not to proclaim fixed results, but to exhibit the best methods of study in theology and religion; to stimulate inquiry into matters still unsettled or unknown to the bottom, and to encourage and aim at a scientific mode in treating them. It is already plain that the Institute has not mistaken its way, and that its original aim and object is one deemed practicable and useful. When the Institute was first projected, it was supposed that the study of theological problems and the critical pursuit of truth in matters of religion was a work so nearly akin to that of theological schools, that only ministers anxious to continue the studies commenced there would be interested in its meetings. It was even seriously proposed to exclude the laity, lest any temptation to adapt the papers to their supposed tastes might lessen their frankness and rob them of the scientific severity which was so much desired by professional students. The experience of two sessions has proved that this notion did injustice to the laity; that they are quite as eager for thorough, scholarly, logical, and scientific treatment of theological questions as the ministers themselves, and no more alarmed at the light which learned criticism is throwing upon the history of the religious sentiment, the relations of the great religions to each other, the origin of our own sacred writings, nor at the changes which modern science, and especially anthropology, is making necessary in our views of inspiration and revelation, than those who have been professionally trained to the investigation of these theories.