

**GOD AND THE BIBLE: A
SEQUEL TO LITERATURE
AND DOGMA; PP. 1-238**

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God and the Bible: A Sequel to Literature and Dogma; pp. 1-238 by Matthew Arnold

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'Im Princip, das Festehende zu erhalten. Revolutionären vorbeugen, atteme ich ganz mit den Monarchisten überein; nur nicht in den Mitteln dazu. Sie nämlich rufen die Dummheit und die Finsternis zu Hilfe, ich den Verstand und das Licht.'

GOETHE.

'In the principle, to preserve what exists, to hinder revolutionists from having their way, I am quite at one with the monarchists; only not in the means thereto. That is to say, they call in stupidity and darkness to aid, I reason and light.'

GOD AND THE BIBLE

A SEQUEL TO
LITERATURE AND DOGMA

By MATTHEW ARNOLD



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PREFACE.

THE present volume is a sequel to the popular edition of *Literature and Dogma* published last year. It is meant to reproduce, in a somewhat condensed and much cheaper form, a work, *God and the Bible*, which the objections to *Literature and Dogma* called forth.

Literature and Dogma had altogether for its object, and so too has the present work,—a work which clears, develops and defends the positions taken in *Literature and Dogma*,—to show the truth and necessity of Christianity, and also its charm for the heart, mind, and imagination of man, even though the preternatural, which is now its popular sanction, should have to be given up. To show this, is the end for which both books were written.

For the power of Christianity has been in the immense emotion which it has excited; in its engaging, for the government of man's conduct, the mighty forces of love, reverence, gratitude, hope, pity, and awe,—all that host of allies which Wordsworth includes under the one name of *imagination*, when he says that in the uprooting of old thoughts and old rules we must still always ask:—

Survives *imagination*, to the change
Superior? Help to virtue does she give?
If not, O mortals, better cease to live!

Popular Christianity has enjoyed abundantly and with profit this help from the imagination to virtue and conduct. I have always thought, therefore, that merely to destroy the illusions of popular Christianity was indefensible. Time, besides, was sure to do it; but when it is done, the whole work of again cementing the alliance between the imagination and conduct remains to be effected. To those who effect nothing for the new alliance but only dissolve the old, we take once more our text from Wordsworth, and we say:—

Why with such earnest pains dost thou provoke
The years to bring on the inevitable yoke,
Thus blindly with man's blessedness at strife?
Full soon his soul will have its earthly freight;—

soon enough will the illusions which charmed and aided man's inexperience be gone; what have you to give him in the place of them?

At the present moment two things about the Christian religion must surely be clear to anybody with eyes in his head. One is, that men cannot do without it; the other, that they cannot do with it as it is.

Christianity enabled, or professed to enable, mankind to deal with personal conduct,—with an immense matter, at least three-fourths of human life. And it seems strange that people should even imagine, either that men will not demand something enabling them to do this, or that the spread of physical science, and knowing that not the sky moves but the earth, can in any way do it. And so the Secularists find themselves at fault in their calculations; and the best scientific specialists are forward to confess, what is evident enough, both that religion must and will have its claims attended to, and that physics and religion

have, as Joubert says, absolutely nothing to do with one another. Charlatans may bluster ; but, speaking in defence of the genuine men of science, M. Réville declares of them that 'they willingly recognise the legitimacy of the religious element in the human spirit, but they say that to provide the satisfaction due to it is not a business with which they are competent to deal.'¹

It is true, all men of science are not thus sober-minded. Thus we find a brilliant professor of mathematics, too early lost to us, launching invectives which, if they are just, would prove either that no religion at all has any right to mankind's regard, or that the Christian religion, at all events, has none. Professor Clifford calls Christianity 'that awful plague which has destroyed two civilisations and but barely failed to slay such promise of good as is now struggling to live amongst men.' He warns his fellow men against showing any tenderness to 'the slender remnant of a system which has made its red mark on history and still lives to threaten mankind.' 'The grotesque forms of its intellectual belief,' he sternly adds, by way of finish, 'have survived the discredit of its moral teaching.'

But these are merely the crackling fireworks of youthful paradox. One reads it all, half sighing, half smiling, as the declamation of a clever and confident youth, with the hopeless inexperience, irredeemable by any cleverness, of his age. Only when one is young and headstrong can one thus prefer bravado to experience, can one stand by the Sea of Time, and instead of listening to the solemn and rhythmical beat

¹ Ils reconnaissent volontiers la légitimité de l'élément religieux de l'esprit humain ; mais ils disent qu'il ne rentre pas dans leur compétence de lui fournir les satisfactions qu'il réclame.

of its waves, choose to fill the air with one's own whoopings to start the echo. But the mass of plain people hear such talk with impatient indignation, and flock all the more eagerly to Messrs. Moody and Sankey. They feel that the brilliant freethinker and revolutionist talks about their religion and yet is all abroad in it, does not know either that or the great facts of human life; and they go to those who know them better. And the plain people are not wrong. Compared with Professor Clifford, Messrs. Moody and Sankey are masters of the philosophy of history. Men are not mistaken in thinking that Christianity has done them good, in loving it, in wishing to listen to those who will talk to them about what they love, and will talk of it with admiration and gratitude, not contempt and hatred. Christianity is truly, as I have somewhere called it, 'the greatest and happiest stroke ever yet made for human perfection.' Men do not err, they are on firm ground of experience, when they say that they have practically found Christianity to be something incomparably beneficent. Where they err, is in their way of accounting for this, and of assigning its causes.

And here we reach our second point: that men cannot do with Christianity as it is. Something true and beneficent they have got hold of in it, they know; and they want to rely upon this, and to use it. But what men rely upon and use, they seek to give themselves account of, they seek to make clear its right to be relied upon and used. Now, the old ways of accounting for Christianity, of establishing the ground of its claims upon us, no longer serve as they once did. Men's experience widens, they get to know the world better, to know the mental history of mankind better; they