

**FOUR ESSAYS ON
THEOLOGICAL
SUBJECTS**

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Four essays on theological subjects by Edward Ash

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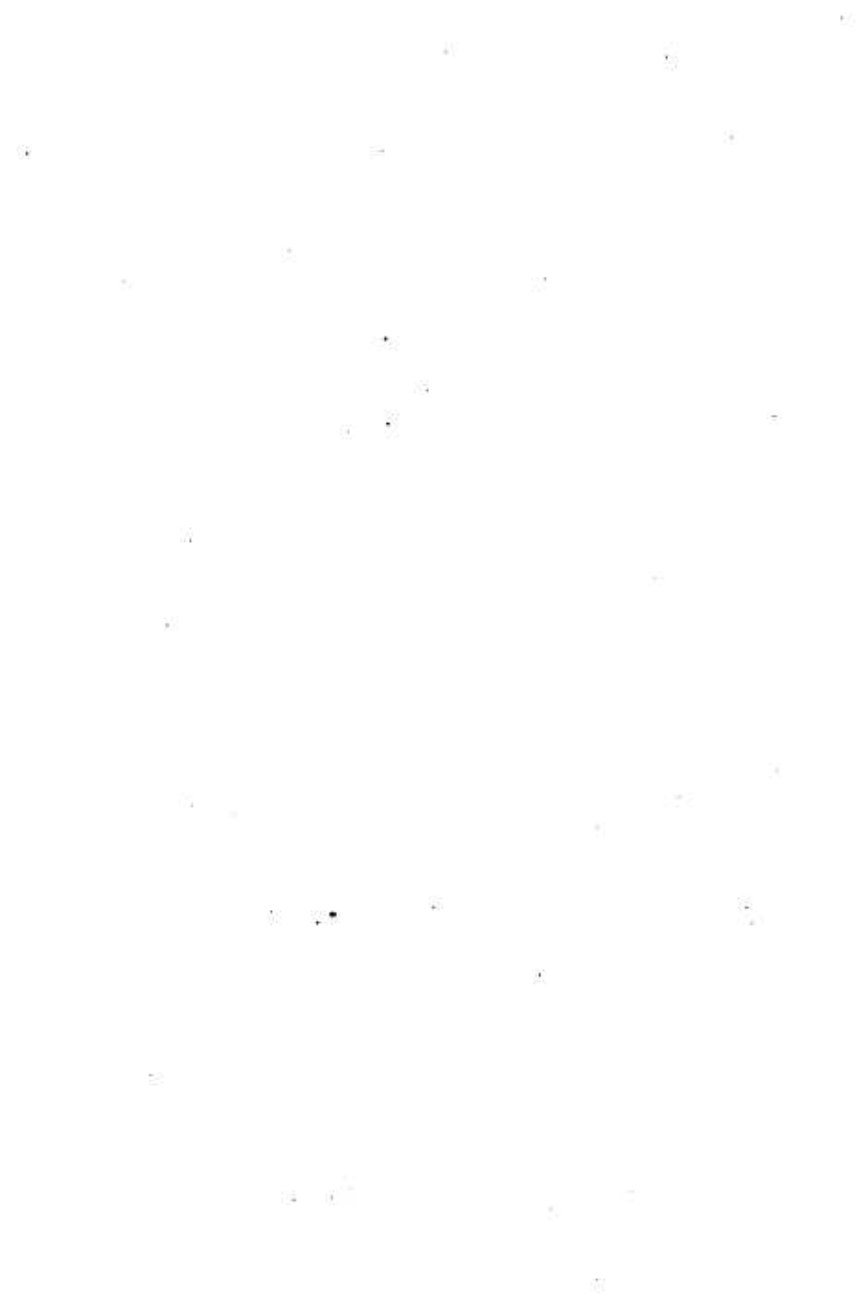
FOUR ESSAYS
ON
THEOLOGICAL SUBJECTS,

BY EDWARD ASH, M.D.

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PREFACE.

In applying the word *Essay* to the contents of this little volume, I use it in its original rather than in its present ordinary sense. These Essays are not Treatises, but simply attempts to contribute something towards a true understanding of the subjects of which they speak.

The great intrinsic importance of the subject of the first two Essays, together with the nature of the controversies respecting them which have of late so largely occupied the church's attention, makes any explanation of their introduction here altogether needless. The subject of the third Essay has long occupied my thoughts; and I had not only designed, from the first, to give it a place in this volume, but had made considerable progress with the Essay itself before I learnt that a fellow-member of the christian community with which I am more immediately connected was preparing a work on the same subject. My reason for introducing that of the fourth Essay has been, in part, the prominence which has been given to a particular branch of it in the late controversies; and in part, the comparatively

small amount of attention which the subject as a whole seems generally to obtain even among thoughtful christians.

The first Essay will be found to include only one of the various lines of argument by which the authority and inspiration of the holy scriptures may be sustained. In the three other Essays I have sought to deduce the teaching of scripture, in relation to their several subjects, from a careful examination of its language; one, however, rather directed to the gathering of its general meaning, than consisting in minute textual analysis or verbal criticism. In each of the Essays I have referred, for purposes of argument and illustration, to many passages of scripture without quoting them. I am well aware that careless or hasty readers will not take the trouble to consult the passages themselves, and will thus be unable to appreciate their bearing upon the matter in hand. They however who take a real interest in the several subjects here discussed, and are anxious to learn what the scriptures teach concerning them, will not grudge this trouble, and will be amply recompensed for it by the necessary tendency of such a course to make their ultimate conclusions rest, not on their own preconceived ideas, nor on the opinions of other men, but on the teaching of the Spirit of truth himself.

ESSAY I.

ON THE AUTHORITY AND INSPIRATION OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES.

As the authority and inspiration of the holy scriptures rest on various kinds of evidence, so they may be sustained by different lines of argument. The following is one which seems entitled to more prominence than has been commonly given to it. It will be seen to assume, as its foundation, the divine character and mission of Christ.

If we admit the genuineness and authenticity of the New Testament Scriptures, and ascribe to them only as much truthfulness and accuracy of statement as we do to multitudes of other books, we must necessarily accept the account which they give of the teaching of our Lord and his Apostles as substantially accurate and reliable. Now in that teaching we continually find certain conditions spoken of in the most express terms as absolutely indispensable to men's being in a state of acceptance and friendship with God in the present life, and to their enjoying happiness and escaping misery in that which is to come.* But if such conditions really exist, it would seem to be an inevitable conclusion that God should, in some way or other, have

* The question, how far what is here said applies to those who are ignorant of God's revealed truth, will be found considered in the Fourth Essay.

furnished us with a perfectly authentic and reliable statement of them : and since it is certain that he has not done so in any other way, there is evidently a very strong presumption, arising out of the necessity of the case, in favour of the perfect truth and consequent authority of the New Testament representation of them.

Again, when we consider that what may thus, for brevity sake, be termed the conditions of men's salvation, as made known under the new covenant dispensation, not only directly involve, but are altogether founded upon the being, attributes, purposes, and ways of God, the relation in which man stands to him, and the provision which he has made for men's restoration and salvation, we further see a no less cogent reason, arising in like manner out of the necessity of the case, for concluding that the New Testament account of these things also must be perfectly authentic and reliable.

The argument, as thus far pursued, will be found to embrace all that portion of the contents of the New Testament which relates to what we are accustomed distinctively to term "divine truth." But that truth is constantly represented as standing in close and inseparable connexion with certain matters of fact and history, relating especially to Christ and his Apostles. There must needs then be the same antecedent reason for regarding the accounts of these also as unquestionably true.

But to whatever extent the foregoing argument may embrace the contents of the New Testament, it cannot be said to embrace them all. Much still remains in regard to which the question has to be answered, Is it also perfectly reliable? In other words, Are the whole contents of the volume to be accounted true and authoritative, or is

there some portion of them which cannot be so accounted? Let us look at this question, first as one of probability, and then as one of fact.

If the preceding argument be sound, not only will it necessarily follow that God must have specially appointed these scriptures to be an authoritative record of the several kinds of truth of which we have now been speaking, but also that he must have employed special and supernatural means to render them such; since the experience of mankind altogether forbids the supposition of their contents possessing the attributes of truth and accuracy to the extent here assumed, without some interposition of this kind. Now if he who is emphatically "a God of truth" has seen meet thus largely and closely to identify himself (so to speak) with these writings, is it likely that he should have suffered mistake or error of any kind to find admission into them? Or can we wonder that there should be, in most devout minds, an instinctive repugnance to admit such an idea?

Again, looking more immediately at these scriptures considered in themselves, assuming their purpose and character to be those just now described, bearing in mind the momentous and sacred nature of the truths of which they were especially appointed to be the depository, and considering how they thus stand distinguished by a broad and definite line of separation from all other writings (the Old Testament Scriptures only excepted), it would surely seem highly improbable that mistake or error of any kind should have been allowed to form part of their contents.

It will be seen that both the foregoing grounds of improbability are irrespective of the consideration (so