

**THE PRESENT
RELIGIOUS CRISIS**

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The present religious crisis by Augustus Blauvelt

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AUGUSTUS BLAUVELT

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PREFACE.

AFTER having perused this volume, the reader will perceive that it is not designed to be complete in itself. On the other hand, it is put forth merely as the first of a series of volumes, the second of which will be entitled "The Religion of Jesus," and the third "Supernatural Religion."

Whether the author will or will not be able to develop the entire scheme of religious thought, which he has projected in his own mind, within the compass of these three volumes, without prolonging them to an undesirable length, remains to be determined. If he can, he will. Otherwise it will be abundant time to announce the specific titles of the remaining works after it becomes manifest that they must be written.

Like every other literary project or production, this one in particular has had its own inner and individual history. When the author says that he was graduated from Rutgers College, at New Brunswick, N.J., and also from the Peter Hertzog Theological Seminary, connected with the same institution, he has given a sufficient guaranty that his original instruction in divinity was of the most hyper-orthodox description. Nor does he concede that any alumnus of either Alma Mater ever went forth who was, to begin with, a more devout and implicit believer than he was in both the essentials and the non-essentials of the general orthodox theology, and notably that of the Calvinistic order.

It is needless to assure the reader, that, while he was a student at New Brunswick, the author was most securely

guarded against all contamination from modern infidelity. He does not remember, for example, that in those days he ever heard so much as the very mention of the name of Strauss. At the same time he does have an indistinct recollection, that, in a vague and general way, he was taught at once to dread and to abhor that modern theological monstrosity, namely, German Rationalism. Just why he should either dread or abhor it, he did not learn; but that it was a theological monstrosity of some sort or another, to be both dreaded and abhorred, he took for granted on the *ipse dixit* of those distinguished Doctors in Divinity whose special prerogative he then conceived it to be to form his opinions on all such subjects.

Thus matters continued even after the author's graduation, until some eighteen years ago. Then, for the first time, he chanced one day to get a formal introduction to Dr. David Friedrich Strauss, as that arch-heretic is represented in his first "Life of Jesus."

From that time onward the author has devoted himself, with a constantly increasing degree of exclusiveness, as a specialist, to investigations connected with the various departments of modern biblical and religious research.

The specific purpose with which he originally took up these investigations was to vindicate the traditional Protestant conceptions about the Bible and religion against all the assaults of the modern unbelievers. But from the very outset he conceived the idea, that, to make this vindication of any actual and permanent service to those conceptions, it must itself be actual, it must itself be scientific, it must itself be something decidedly more than merely theological. In other words, whatever inherited conceptions about either

the Bible or religion he found he could not establish by valid evidence and by legitimate reasoning, he resolutely determined that he would never make the effort to establish either by any such distortion of evidence or by any such illegitimate reasoning as he had fortunately come to discover to be only too characteristic of the mediæval apologists.

The longer he has prosecuted his researches from this standpoint and in this spirit, the more he has become astounded at the aggregate results to which he found himself arriving. Contrary to all his original anticipations, he has come more and more distinctly to perceive that the traditional Protestant conceptions about both the Bible and religion, instead of being scientifically defensible even down to details, require a revision and re-statement of the most revolutionary nature.

Some suggestions towards such a revision and re-statement the reader will find attempted in this series of volumes : the first of which is herewith submitted to the consideration of that portion of the public which feels an interest in current biblical and religious discussions.

In the preface to his thoughtful and scholarly work on "The Authorship and Historical Character of the Fourth Gospel," Dr. William Sanday says : "In looking back over this first attempt in the difficult and responsible field of theology, I am forcibly reminded of its many faults and shortcomings. And yet it seems to be necessary that these subjects should be discussed, if only with some slight degree of adequacy. I cannot think it has not been without serious loss on both sides, that, in the great movement that has been going on upon the Continent for the last forty years, the scanty band of English theologians should

have stood almost entirely aloof, or should *only* have touched the outskirts of the questions at issue, without attempting to grapple with them at their centre. It is not for me to presume to do this, but I wish to approach as near to it as I can and dare ; and it has seemed to me that by beginning upon the critical side, and taking a single question in hand at a time, I might be not altogether unable to contribute to that perhaps far-off result which will only be obtained by the co-operation of many men and many minds."

In like manner the present writer feels that any suggestions which he can personally make towards that fundamental revision of the traditional misconceptions about the Bible and religion which the present age and hour demand, must of necessity be more distinguished for their many faults and shortcomings than for any thing beside. But here in America the average theological considerations of these subjects have thus far been, in comparison with those of Germany, even more superficial, even more unintelligent, even more mediæval, than have been those of England. And it is high time that we began here in America to grapple in earnest with these questions at their very centre ; seeking to come to a thorough-going understanding with them, in view of the most advanced developments of present biblical and religious enlightenment, and even speculation.

If the author can *only* succeed in stimulating other and far more able minds, other and far more accomplished scholars, to contribute something towards a radical and satisfactory adjustment of these issues, he will after that be perfectly content to see his own crude conclusions discarded and forgotten.

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