

RELIGION AND LIFE

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Religion and life by Elwood Worcester

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ELWOOD WORCESTER

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AND LIFE**

PREFACE

I OFFER this book with mingled feelings of hesitation and of hope. Much of my own religious life and experience is contained within its covers, and for this reason I cannot help shrinking from revealing that which is personally dear and sacred. On the other hand, I hope that thoughts which have brightened my own life and which have sustained others when uttered may also be helpful when read.

The unity of this volume lies in its subject-matter, Religion in its relation to Life. As both these words are words of unending richness and variety, the discussion of them must bear the same characteristics. We cannot grasp religion in its totality any more than we can grasp life. In attempting to do so we succeed in laying hold only of a pale abstraction, the ghost of both. What we may aim at is depicting certain phases of the great drama of man's life in the presence of the Infinite which we have torn from reality and have invested with the spirit and breath of our own souls. As this book is frankly, avowedly, and positively Christian, I have established it as far as possible on texts of the Scriptures. Some of these studies deal

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with the social aspects of religion, with the mighty spirit of aspiration and unrest which penetrates the world to-day, and with the difficult problems presented to Christianity by the tendencies of contemporary society. Some chapters are concerned with the problem of the personal life. Others discuss important phases of the life and teaching of Jesus, the meaning of his death and the reality of his resurrection. The method I have employed is the only one I know, the suppression of no truth and the ignoring of no felt difficulty, sincerity and simplicity of statement, and the unostentatious use of what knowledge I possess. I am keenly aware how little real originality this or any other serious and comprehensive statement of such themes can boast at the present day. Every one of these great thoughts has come down to us through countless other minds. All that we can hope to attain is the application of old truths to new conditions or new statements of the eternal problems. As this work is most simple in character and intended to be popular in its use, I have refrained from burdening its pages with references and quotations, and in preparing it I have intentionally avoided consulting the works of other men. Yet I am deeply sensible of how much I owe to such works, and I acknowledge in advance any obligations which may be detected by the well-read.

There are two qualities of this work to which I may be permitted to call attention. Its estimates of Christianity and of the person and character of Jesus

PREFACE

are based on a lifelong study of the New Testament and upon a fair knowledge of the methods and results of modern criticism, while the parts bearing upon human life have been written in the light of an unusual opportunity to study the lives and consciences of men and women. The result of this twofold training is a faith that rests on some knowledge and on much experience, and I ask the reader to believe that when I describe the effects of religious belief on human life I am not speaking of that which I do not know. There is no peace so deep as the peace of God and the normal effect of this costly possession is the heightening of all our physical and spiritual faculties, access to all that is deepest and most beautiful in human nature and an eager desire to extend to others the blessings we have received. As for our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the better he is understood the more he will be loved and adored. We do not begin to realize how much we owe to him. The old rationalistic attempt to bring Jesus down to our level has crumbled by reason of its inherent weakness and because he ever escapes us and towers above us. For a long time no new "liberal" Life of Jesus will be written by men sufficiently instructed to be able to undertake this arduous and fruitless task. While the spirit and the influence of Jesus were never more apparent in human life than they are to-day, his person has receded to his own century and to his solitary and unique place in human history. What remains for us is not to bring Christ up from the dead, but to consecrate ourselves to him

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under whose banner every thinking man must ultimately march and to cause his ideals to be realized in this world.

ELWOOD WORCESTER.

Emmanuel Church, Boston.

November, 1913.

Part I

SOCIAL ASPECTS OF RELIGION

RELIGION AND LIFE

I

CHRISTIANITY AND THE SOCIAL QUESTION

For the Son of man is come to seek and save that which was lost.
—St. Luke xix: 10.

WONDERFUL as Jesus' teaching was, the impression he produced on the world was not by word alone. He found himself in a world of sin and misery which he ever drew closer and closer to himself, and in which he still dwells as its embodied conscience. No thought is oftener in our minds than whether Jesus would approve our conduct. No question is more earnestly asked than what would Jesus think of this or that fact of our modern life.

He did not deny the reality of this world, nor pretend that it is the best possible world, nor did he say that man is a perfect being. But he offered us a religion of redemption and of progress. To the intellectual needs of man he offered a religion so pure, so simple, so vital, so free from superstition and unreason that it has ever been the chief source of light and of progress to the nations that have accepted it.