

A FIRST PRIMER OF APOLOGETICS

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A First Primer of Apologetics by Robert Mackintosh

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ROBERT MACKINTOSH

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OF APOLOGETICS**

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APOLOGETICS

BY

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1900

to
MY WIFE

PREFATORY NOTE.

THE purpose of this little book is to give a thoroughly frank statement of the Christian argument as it shapes itself in the light of present-day knowledge and criticism. Unfortunately, it was not possible to cover the whole field within the limits of space at command. It is hoped that what is most essential has been given.

The first three chapters are introductory. The last words of Chapter III. sketch the course of the subsequent exposition.

The few notes added are meant principally for younger readers.

Proc. M.L.P. 7-1-10

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I

CUSTOM AND REASON

IN studying Christian evidences, we are seeking to discover and exactly define the reason we have for believing as we do—the reason for our faith in Christianity—if one should not rather say, for our faith in Christ. We are studying and testing the grounds of our most sacred convictions. But we cannot very profitably discuss this deeper question unless we have first asked, What is the reason for our belief in other truths? There is no difficulty, perhaps, about facts which fall immediately under the cognizance of our own senses. It is generally conceded, and we may take it for granted as roughly true, that our senses afford a sufficient guarantee of such facts. But we believe a whole world besides these. What is the reason of such wider belief?

The first great reason for human belief that runs beyond the senses' warrant is tradition, or external authority—we believe because we are told. That is the system on which we all begin. If we were such young rationalists that we refused to take mother's word or the nurse's word—if even in babyhood we were resolved to 'prove all things' for ourselves—we should most probably fall victims to our premature scientific ardour. Our experiments would be too much for us. But the human child with all its faults is a trustful creature. Hence it is easy to amuse yourself—poor amusement, indeed!—by trying how many absurdities a little child will swallow. And hence, also, the human child

is embarrassingly apt to propound its own source of final certainty as a guarantee for others. A young man of my acquaintance, walking out with his nurse when a child of tender years, espied a new-comer to the town, and began to characterize him in a loud voice with the terrible frankness of infancy: 'That's Mr. So-and-so, Janet; he's got a most unfortunate temper.' 'Oh, hush, hush, Henry! you mustn't say such things.' '*Papa says so.*' He knew no higher authority; and how should it ever be out of place to quote his oracle?

Our own children begin life upon this system, and the backward, childish races never emerge from it. Where do they get their moral ideas, or their religious ideas, or such scientific ideas as they possess? From tradition. The child is surrounded by older persons, who have far more knowledge and wisdom than he himself; and the childish race feigns that its ancestors, who gave currency—or so it thinks—to the first tradition, were vastly wiser than any living man. Time has consecrated all their beliefs, their shrewd guesses, their wildest follies. Livingstone's Makololo followers, who crossed with him to the West of Africa, could not believe what he told them about the ocean until they saw it for themselves. And then they were overwhelmed with bewilderment. 'We had followed our friend many months,' they said, 'believing what our fathers told us, that there is no end to the world, when suddenly the world said to us, "I am done; there is no more of me."' This is a picturesque and striking example of the savage's love of personifying; it is also a good example of the obstinate reliance which he places upon the traditions that have come down to him from his forefathers.

Neither child nor savage finds it easy to begin thinking for himself. Hence at first it is keenly painful to encounter teaching which cannot be accepted. The labour of thought

is unwelcome; heterodoxy, challenging our familiar orthodoxies, is an odious thing. Afterwards pure thinking may become the source of as keen a pleasure as is known to man. We may love speculative thought too well for our own good, placed as we are in a world where action is the first thing needful. But in early days all this life of thought is as remote from us as the back of the moon. We ought therefore to be very careful what books we put into the hands of our children. If they meet with strange religious and moral teachings, they may accept them from the force of habit, and that will be bad; or with pain and conscientious effort they may reject them; but that process, if it comes too early in life, is scarcely less bad. It does not answer to strain the delicate young powers of mind and conscience. They grow best in half-lights, in a healthy, instinctive obedience that asks no questions, and knows nothing of doubts. Even the great and good Dr. Arnold of Rugby is thought to have injured some pupils. His policy was to instil 'moral thoughtfulness'; the mechanism even of that healthy little animal the English schoolboy could not always bear the strain. Our children must not be too thoughtful. Let them rest while they may, under the shelter of a loving authority. Beyond a doubt, something similar was needful for primitive races of mankind.

But the time comes when thought must awaken, and the individual, or the race, must pass out of childhood, and put away childish things. Our young men, and probably even our thoughtful young women, must have their initiation into personal religious certainty through an ordeal of religious doubt. This is neither a thing to deprecate nor a thing to boast of. It is a natural appointment of God's providence, painful in itself and full of dangers, but most salutary to those who face it with an honest and good heart. If we have never doubted, we can hardly help the doubts of