

**THEOLOGY AND THE SOCIAL
CONSCIOUSNESS: A STUDY OF
THE RELATIONS OF THE SOCIAL
CONSCIOUSNESS TO THEOLOGY**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649380831

Theology and the social consciousness: a study of the relations of the social consciousness to theology by Henry Churchill King

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Cover @ 2017

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SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS TO THEOLOGY

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SECOND EDITION

HODDER & STOUGHTON
NEW YORK
GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY

COPYRIGHT, 1902
BY THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

Set up and electrotyped September, 1902
Reprinted February, 1904;
July, 1907; August, 1910; April, 1912.

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To the Members of the
Harvard Summer School of Theology

OF THE YEAR 1901

IN RECOGNITION OF THEIR INTEREST IN THE LECTURES
THAT FORMED THE BASIS OF THIS BOOK

PREFACE

THERE is no attempt in this book to present a complete system of theology, though much of such a system is passed in review, but only to study a special phase of theological thinking. The precise theme of the book is the relations of the social consciousness to theology. This is the subject upon which the writer was asked to lecture at the Harvard Summer School of Theology of 1901; and the book has grown out of the lectures there given. In preparing the book for the press, however, the lecture form has been entirely abandoned, and considerable material added.

The importance of the theme seems to justify a somewhat thorough-going treatment. If one believes at all in the presence of God in history—and the Christian can have no doubt here—he must be profoundly

interested in such a phenomenon as the steady growth of the social consciousness. Hardly any inner characteristic of our time has a stronger historical justification than that consciousness; and it has carried the reason and conscience of the men of this generation in rare degree. Having its own comparatively independent development, and yet making an ethical demand that is thoroughly Christian, it furnishes an almost ideal standpoint from which to review our theological statements, and, at the same time, a valuable test of their really Christian quality.

In attempting, then, a careful study of the relations of the social consciousness to theology, this book aims, first, definitely to get at the real meaning of the social consciousness as the theologian must view it, and so to bring clearly into mind the unconscious assumptions of the social consciousness itself; and then to trace out the influence of the social consciousness upon the conception of religion, and upon theo-

logical doctrine. The larger portion of the book is naturally given to the influence upon theological doctrine; and to make the discussion here as pointed as possible, the different elements of the social consciousness are considered separately.

It should be noted, however, that the question raised is not the historical one, How, as a matter of fact, has the social consciousness modified the conception of religion or the statement of theological doctrine? but the theoretical one, How should the social consciousness naturally affect religion and doctrine? In this sense, the result might be called, in President Hyde's phrase, a "social theology"; but, as I believe that the social consciousness is at bottom only a true sense of the fully personal, I prefer myself to think of the present book as only carrying out in more detail the contention of my *Reconstruction in Theology*—that theology should aim at a restatement of doctrine in strictly personal terms. So conceived, in spite of its casual origin, this book follows very naturally upon