

THE NEMESIS OF FAITH

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The Nemesis of Faith by J. A. Froude

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J. A. FROUDE

**THE NEMESIS OF
FAITH**

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NEMESIS OF FAITH.

BY

J. A. FROUDE, M. A.,
THE ENGLISH HISTORIAN.

*“Καὶ μὴ ἔργω γ’ οὐκ ἔτι μύθῳ
Χθῶν θεοαλευταί
. . . . σικριᾶ δ’ ἀνέμων
Πνεύματα πάντων, εἰς ἄλλα
Στάσιν ἀντίπνον ἀποδεικνύμενα.”*

PROMETHEUS.

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LETTER I.

Huntley Parsonage, September 4, 18—.

I PROMISED so long ago to write to you, dear Arthur, that by this time, if you have not already forgotten me, you will at least have begun to think it desirable to forget me as soon as possible, for an ungrateful, good-for-nothing fellow; but I am going to be very just, and pay heavy interest—and I think letter debts are like all other debts. If you pay them when they are due, they are taken as a matter of course, and without gratitude; but leave them till your poor creditor leaves off expecting, and then they fall in like a godsend. So I hope you are already delighted at the sight of my handwriting, and when you get to the end of these long sheets, which I am intending to fill to you, I shall be quite back again in my old favor. Perhaps, though, I am too sanguine; I have nothing but myself to write about, no facts, no theories, no opinions, no adventures,

no sentiments, nothing but my own poor barren individualism, of considerable interest to me, but I do not know why I should presume it will be so to you. Egotism is not tiresome, or it ought not to be, if one is sincere about oneself; but it is so hard to be sincere. Well, never mind, I mean to be, and you know me well enough to see through me when I am humbugging. A year has gone since we parted; I have had nothing all this time to tell you, except that I was unsettled and uncomfortable, and why should I trouble you with that? Now, you will see I want your help, so now I come to you. It is not that I have had any positive grievance, but I seem to have had hold of every thing by the wrong side. My father is very anxious to see me settled into some profession or other, and here have the three black graces alternately been presenting their charms to me, and I can't get the apple delivered; I turn from one to the other, and the last I look at seems always the ugliest, always has some disagreeable feature I cannot reconcile myself with. I cannot tell why it is, Arthur, but I scarcely know a professional man I can like, and certainly not one who has been what the world calls successful, that I should the least wish to resemble. The roads they have to travel are beaten in by the unscupulous as well as the scrupulous; they are none of the cleanest, and the race is too fast to give one time to pick one's way. I know men try to keep their private conscience distinct from their professional conscience, but

it does not always do. Their nature, like the dyer's hand, is subdued to what it works in; and you know a lawyer when you see him, or a doctor, or a professional clergyman. They are not simply men, but men of a particular sort, and, unfortunately, something not more but less than men—men who have sacrificed their own selves to become the paid instruments of a system. There may be exceptions where there is very great genius; but I am not a genius, and I cannot trust myself to hope I should be an exception, and so I go round and round, and always end where I began, in difficulties. I believe you know something of my father—a more upright, excellent man never breathed; and though not very clever, yet he has a breadth of solid understanding which, for such creatures as we men are, is far better furniture to be sent into the world with than any cleverness; and I am sure there must be something wrong in my fastidiousness when he so highly disapproves of it. He was contented to laugh at me, you know, as long as I was at college, because my dreaming, as he called it, did not interfere with my succeeding there; but it is quite another thing now, and he urges me again and again, almost with a severity of reproof which is bitterly distressing to me. I have shown talents, he says, of which it is my duty to make use; the common sense of mankind has marked out the best ways to use them, and it is worse than ridiculous in a young man such as I am to set myself up to be different from

everybody else, and to be too good to do what many of the best and wisest men he knows, are doing. My brothers were all getting on honorably and steadily, and why was not I? It was true, he allowed, that unscrupulous men did sometimes succeed professionally, but it was not by their faults, but by their virtues, by activity and prudence, and manly self-restraint. . . . He added something which made a deeper impression upon me than this; for all this I had said often and often to myself. I had told him that as I had a small independence, I thought I might wait at least a year or two, and give myself time to understand my own wishes clearly before I committed myself. "You say you wish to be a man, Markham," he answered, "and not a professional man. I do not propose to control you. At your age, and with your talents, you must learn what life is now, not from me, but from life itself; but if you will hear an old man's opinion, I will give it you. If you think you can temper yourself into manliness by sitting here over your books, supposing you will grow into it as a matter of course, by a rule of necessity, in the same way as your body grows old, it is the very silliest fancy that ever tempted a young man into his ruin. You cannot dream yourself into a character; you must hammer and forge yourself one. Go out into life, you will find your chance there, and only there. You ask to wait. It is like a timid boy waiting on the river bank to take his plunge. The longer he stands shivering

the harder he finds it. At the year's end you will see more difficulties than you see now, because you yourself will have grown feebler. Wait one more, and then you will most likely go on to the end, into your second childhood of helplessness."

What shall I do, Arthur? It is so true, every word of this. I feel it is. I know it is; and it is shameful, indeed, to rust into nothingness. Yet what to do! Surely it were kinder far to train us out from our cradles into a course which should be chosen for us, and make us begin our crawling on the road we are to travel, with spelling-books of law and physic, and nursery courts of justice, or diseased dolls to lecture or to doctor. All would be so easy then; we should form each about our proper centre, and revolve calmly and surely in the orbit into which we were projected. It is a frightful business to bring us up to be only men, and then bid us choose for ourselves one of three roads which are to take us down again. For they do take us down. Unless we are in Fortune's best books, and among those same lucky sons of genius, for law or physic, we must learn a very dirty lesson, and train our lips into very smooth chicanery, or it is slow enough her wheel will move with us. Speak the truth, and the truth only, and in the first you are a fool, and in the second you are a brute. "Ah, well, but at least the Church is open to you," you will say, and that is what my father says. There the most fastidious person will find the purest