

**LIBERALISM IN
RELIGION; AND
OTHER SERMONS**

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Liberalism in religion; and other sermons by W. Page Roberts

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BY
W. PAGE ROBERTS, M.A.

MINISTER OF S. PETER'S, VINE STREET, LONDON; FORMERLY VICAR OF EYE, SUFFOLK.
AUTHOR OF 'LAW AND GOD' 'DISCERNABLE SERVICE' &c.

'But what more oft, in nations grown corrupt
And by their vices brought to servitude,
Than to love bondage more than liberty—
Bondage with ease than strenuous liberty—
And to despise, or envy, or suspect
Whom God hath of His special favour raised
As their deliverer? If he ought begin,
How frequent to desert him, and at last
To heap ingratitude on worsted deeds!'

Sermon Against.

LONDON
SMITH, ELDER, & CO., 15 WATERLOO PLACE
1886

TO
MY WIFE
CONSTANT COMPANION AND BEST FRIEND
I
DEDICATE THIS VOLUME

P R E F A C E.

THE words Liberal and Liberalism at once arouse a spirit of mistrust in many minds, which become unsympathetic, irrecptive, and resentful. Even those who appropriate these words in politics are less ready to adopt them in religion. Indeed, it seems as though men had but a strictly limited quantity of mental motor energy, and that those who expend it in one kind of movement have none left for any other. Certainly the sects which are supposed to be the backbone of political Liberalism are the most obstinately immovable in religion; and men ever ready to catch the first breeze impelling to political change have remained stolid as stone to the impulses of spiritual progress. Like Lot's wife, their eyes are fixed on the past, and they cannot stir. But the title I have

given to these Sermons carries with it no political connotation. I did not invent it. It is used to denote a party which exists in the Protestant Churches, and which has ever had its analogue in the Church Catholic. Its apostle is St. Paul, and the Church which is without it must have the same fate as the Church of Jerusalem. I should have preferred to speak of the methods of Divine education, or of the dynamics of religion; but I must take the name which foes have given. Of this, however, I am certain, that Liberalism *in* religion is Conservatism *of* religion. If it were not I would not be its apologist. Should this little volume be found useful, I may offer another, intended to show how admirably the Church's Offices of Common Prayer and of the Holy Communion serve to express the worship of a Liberal in religion. The Prayer-Book is for us as well as for our brethren. If in some of its phrases we find simpler meanings—meanings which we think are closer to reality—than the more technical meanings given to them by High or by Low Churchmen, it is none the less dear to us. We do not say to the Ritualist, Go to Rome, or, Go to prison; nor do we declare that the Evangelical ought to become a Dis-

sender. If I may say so without levity, we are 'Liberal Unionists,' and the Prayer-Book is the bond which binds us all together. Its voice is, 'Ye are brethren . . . see that ye fall not out by the way.' I may add that the spirit which should animate Liberalism in religion, and the methods it should pursue, are admirably indicated by Dr. Swainson in his invaluable book on the Creeds. He would scarcely care to be called a Liberal in religion, but his words may be laid down as a rule for our proceedings:—

The fact that religion is a science is very often overlooked; and one consequence is that we hear far too frequently of the opposition between science and theology. But theology is a science; in the common consent of all intelligent believers, it has been made into one. Like geology and astronomy, and history and moral philosophy (mental science), it has its peculiar region of facts and phenomena, its peculiar data, its own principles; but it is a serious mistake on the part of its advocates to conceive and represent that the laws which are to govern our investigations regarding it are of a character totally different from those which govern our investigations into other sciences. It must be recognised that this is a mistake before we can hope to draw generally the intelligence of mankind or even devote ourselves in the spirit of St. Paul to the study of Christianity. Of course I know that there is much of *ψευδώνυμος γνώσις* in many of the so-called scientific men of the day, as there is in many of the