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PUBLISHED BY THOMAS SCOTT,  
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## A FAREWELL ADDRESS.

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**I**T is now more than fifteen years since I began the work, which,—so far as regards the periodical issue of my publications,—I must now relinquish, in consequence of continued ill-health and increasing bodily infirmity.

The spectacle of millions of my fellow-countrymen, bound hand and foot by metaphysical and priestly exclusiveness, made so painful an impression upon my mind that I felt irresistibly impelled to expose dogmatic assumptions and promote free theological inquiry as the undoubted right of all thoughtful minds.

Without under-estimating the formidable difficulties which clerical prejudice and bigotry might be expected to interpose in the way of such an enterprise, I entered upon it single-handed and entirely on my own responsibility; resolved in a courteous but uncompromising spirit to do my utmost to bring all my forces to bear upon the errors and superstitions so degrading to man's highest nature, and to follow truth, and truth only, wheresoever it might lead me. In reviewing the past I contemplate with extreme satisfaction the remarkable strides which Free Thought has made in all orthodox sects; but especially in the Church of England. The present agitation among a considerable section of the clergy in favour of Ritualism, which at first sight might be regarded as a retrograde movement, I look upon as necessarily transient, and having no influence upon the highest intellect within the Church. It is but the last convulsive effort of priestcraft to keep hold of the mind of the country, which is fast growing dissatisfied with the arid pastures of ecclesiasticism, and repairing to the spacious and fertile meadows of reason and science.

Even at the period when my labours commenced, intelligent persons interested in the relation of orthodoxy to the age could not fail to observe that the artillery of Science and advanced Biblical scholarship had already been directed against Church dogmas.

Secret doubts and difficulties respecting the doctrines of Biblical inspiration, the atonement, and supernaturalism, here and there disquieted both lay

and clerical minds ; but the war was, for the most part, limited to learned critics in the hostile camps. The conviction was forced upon me that a series of pamphlets discussing the vexed questions in a searching yet reverent manner would be welcomed by large numbers of thoughtful inquirers, and stimulate those who might be desirous of obtaining satisfaction to the free and independent scrutiny of theories erroneously held by the churches to be founded on the " Word of God."

My first efforts met with a much wider and more cordial reception than in my highest expectations I had reason to anticipate.

On the first appearance of my publications, expressions of sympathy with my design and offers of co-operation in the work reached me from what seemed to be the most unlikely quarters, and, for a considerable period afterwards, able and highly-educated clergymen forwarded me manuscripts for publication, containing attacks on the false bulwarks of ecclesiasticism, and expositions of absolute moral verities. Cultivated and earnest laymen, capable of dealing with the points at issue, also came forward voluntarily and contributed useful papers to the series.

While the movement has been under my direction, essays on every branch of theology have been issued, illustrating the unhistorical character of many Bible records, the gradual development of beliefs and ceremonies from Solar and Phallic worship to Christianity, the Priestly Origin of creeds, and the true inductive method of investigation. But while destructive criti-

cism has been freely employed against the mythical element in the Old and New Testament, and the legendary traditions of the Church, which have been put forward by the orthodox as facts, there has been in many of the pamphlets a due recognition of Natural Law and essential Morality as the only solid and sufficient principles for the government of human conduct.

It is one of the most striking evidences of the widespread scepticism throughout Protestant Christendom respecting the foundations of religious faith, that many thousands of persons in all classes of society, —and in all parts of the world,—lay and clerical, have applied to me for my pamphlets, notwithstanding that I have never made use of any other medium of advertising them than their own contents.

The work in which I have been engaged has brought me into very extensive correspondence and personal intimacy with officials and adherents of various churches, and afforded me special opportunities for studying current ecclesiastical and theological movements, and I am forcibly impressed with the belief that there are influences at work which are destined, sooner or later, to cause the disintegration of all existing systems of religion that are based on mere traditional authority, and to emancipate the human mind from the thralldom of priestcraft in every form. Experience and observation combine to convince me that the tendencies of the age point to the ultimate substitution of the authority of reason for that of *alleged* book revelation.

The persuasion gains ground everywhere that the only true orthodoxy is loyalty to reason, and the only infidelity which merits censure is disloyalty to reason. The exaltation of blind and unthinking sentiment above calm and clear judgment constitutes the real offence which the orthodox have unwittingly branded as the "sin against the Holy Ghost."

It is no little gratification to me to note how many clergymen and ministers, now liberated from the bondage of creeds and detached from the worse than useless occupation of teaching dogmas, received their first impulse to free inquiry from the perusal of my publications. Recent charges delivered by Archbishops and Bishops unmistakably convey the impression that they are beginning to tremble for the Ark of Orthodoxy. The most observant dignitaries of the Church openly confess that it is not Ritualism so much as Rationalism which they fear. Nor is their alarm groundless, for the rapid diffusion of the light of science and criticism will eventually disclose the hollowness of the pretensions on which are based the claims of the Christian Scriptures to the attributes of authenticity, genuineness, and miraculous inspiration. No leader of theological opinion affects to deny that the work which, at my own risk, I have carried on, has been an appreciable factor in the general movement of Free Thought within the Church and Nonconformist bodies.

The seed which has been sown, must, in the nature of things, remain for a time, in some instances, appa-

rently unproductive. There is a rapidly increasing number of Liberal thinkers who continue to occupy pulpits, and many more who frequent places of worship, that can hardly be expected to sever suddenly their connexion with their ecclesiastical associations. There are preachers convinced of the false position they hold who, from regard to social standing or from the imperious necessity of earning a living for their families, persist in doing violence to their intellectual and moral nature by reiterating creeds and enforcing dogmas which they have inwardly renounced. There are Liberal thinkers in every sphere of life who keep up a questionable semblance of evangelical devotion from fear of the social "Mrs. Grundy," and in order to avoid injuring the prospects of their sons and daughters in the walks of fashion. But over all such untoward agencies the cause of Freedom of Thought and Freedom of Expression will certainly triumph; and every anathema of priests and denunciation by bigots will but tend to accelerate its progress.

My work has absorbed most of my time and thought and a considerable portion of my private means from the outset. At the same time it has been to myself, as well as to Mrs. Scott, who has throughout rendered me unremitting assistance, a source of unspeakable pleasure. But the work is now done as far as I am concerned, and has already been followed by results far surpassing any expectations I may have ventured to entertain when I began it. I can only trust that genuine sympathy with the object for

which I have laboured may incite others to redoubled zeal in the same cause; for many a blow will still have to be levelled at the fortress of superstition ere it be finally razed to the ground. To those who have aided me with able pen and liberal purse I tender my most hearty and grateful thanks. For the unfailing courtesy and assistance ever rendered me in my work by my printers my sincere acknowledgments are justly due. It is with the deepest regret that I feel myself compelled, most reluctantly, to bid my readers farewell.

While life remains, however, I shall cherish a watchful interest in the movement which I have done my best to promote. Nor can I doubt that those who have derived mental benefit from my labours will do their utmost to guide others, who are seeking the light, towards that simple code of religion and morals which is comprehended in being good and doing good, not in hope of reward, not from fear of punishment, but because it is good.

שלום חסד

THOMAS SCOTT.

11 The Terrace, Farquhar Road,  
Upper Norwood, London, S.E.,

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