



Agnostic's Apology and Other Essays (Philosophical works of Leslie Stephen)

Leslie Stephen

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This volume is a collection of Leslie Stephen's essays, previously published in various magazines and reviews, on the subject of the loss of credibility of theology and the question of how we should react to its demise. In the first essay "An Apology for Agnosticism" Stephen argues from the contradictory utterances of those who profess to be in possession of theological knowledge to the conclusion that the "mysteries" are and will remain beyond our ken. In "The Scepticism of Believers" Stephen turns the arguments of the theologians against themselves - a writer like Mansel, for example, is, he insists, just a sceptic in disguise. The next essay, "Dreams and Realities", likens the whole fabric of dogmatic Christianity to a dream, a product of Man's hopes and fantasies rather than of his reason or experience. In Newman's "Theory of Belief" Stephen comes to grips with a worthy adversary, perhaps the ablest of the contemporary Christian apologists. Newman's position, Stephen admits, is hard to assail, but equally impossible to confirm. "Poisonous Opinions" discusses the question of tolerance, with special reference to the views expressed in Mill's classic "On Liberty". The collection ends with "The Religion of all Sensible Men", in which Stephen characteristically advocates plain speech in matters of religion, and admits that his agnosticism is never likely to become a popular creed, capable of satisfying the emotional needs of mankind at large.

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