

## = The Nemesis of Faith =

The Nemesis of Faith is an epistolary philosophical novel by James Anthony Froude published in 1849 . Partly autobiographical , the novel depicts the causes and consequences of a young priest 's crisis of faith . Like many of his contemporaries , Froude came to question his Christian faith in light of early nineteenth century developments in history , theology , and science . Froude was particularly influenced by the Catholic teachings of the Oxford Movement and by the new approach to religious scholarship developed by the German Higher Critics .

The novel consists primarily of protagonist Markham Sutherland 's account of the development of his religious ideas and doubts , followed by a brief narrative in which Sutherland 's lack of faith leads him and his lover to tragic ends . The novel was condemned by English religious figures and publicly burned by William Sewell ; this led to Froude 's resignation of his fellowship at Oxford University . The novel 's reception amongst literary reviewers was mixed ; while writers such as George Eliot professed profound admiration , others such as Thomas Carlyle were harshly critical . Although no longer widely read as a literary work , it remains significant in intellectual history for its accounts of Victorian scepticism and the Oxford Movement .

## = = Plot summary = =

The story of Markham Sutherland is presented through various letters , journals , and the third @-@ person account of the novel 's supposed editor , Arthur . Sutherland , under pressure from his father to become a clergyman , confesses to Arthur his reservations about accepting the Thirty @-@ Nine Articles and contemporary English Christianity in general . In particular , Sutherland is concerned about the depiction of God in the Old Testament , God 's patronage of the Israelites on non @-@ moral grounds , the doctrine of Eternal Punishment , and the supposed inerrancy of the Bible . Sutherland was profoundly influenced by John Henry Newman in his early years , but was ultimately unable to accept Newman 's doctrines . Sutherland also seeks guidance in the writings of Victorian historian and sage Thomas Carlyle ( who was Froude 's chief intellectual influence in later years ) , but finds no solutions . Tormented by his doubts and subsequent alienation from his family , Sutherland becomes morbidly depressed .

On Arthur 's advice , Sutherland takes orders , hoping that his doubts will eventually pass when he enters a more active life . Because of the selectivity of his sermons , however , his parishioners begin to suspect him of Socinianism . When Sutherland is tricked into making a harsh criticism of the British and Foreign Bible Society , claiming that the text of the Bible without clerical guidance is more likely to lead to wickedness than to Christian faith and virtue , his doubts are revealed , and he is forced to resign his position .

Sutherland travels to Como to rest and recover from illness , indulging in free religious speculation while there . He befriends Helen Leonard , who sympathises with his troubles and listens to his doubts . Helen 's dull , unloving husband prefers to spend time away from his wife , and leaves her in Sutherland 's company for the season . Helen and Sutherland fall in love , causing both great anxiety , although the relationship never becomes physical . The two consider eloping , but Helen decides she cannot leave her daughter , Annie . During this conversation , however , the unsupervised Annie dips her arm into the lake , causing her to fall ill and die soon after . Sutherland again becomes depressed , believing that his religious speculations have brought himself and Helen into sin . He plans suicide , but is stopped at the last moment by an old friend , representative of John Henry Newman . Sutherland retires to a monastery , although his repentance is short lived , and he dies still in doubt . Helen , meanwhile , separates from her husband and retires to a convent , although she is unreconciled with the Church because she maintains that her love for Sutherland is holier than her marriage .

## = = Major themes = =

The novel 's primary interest comes from its depiction of Sutherland 's religious doubts , which arise

from the weakness of a faith based on empirically false historical claims , " old @-@ wives ' tales " taken for truth . Instead , Sutherland aims to follow " not the Christian religion , but the religion of Christ , " spirituality without dogma . However , Froude was not fully satisfied with this formulation , and the Sutherland @-@ Helen plot illustrates the idea that religious speculation and infidelity inevitably lead to immorality .

= = Reception = =

The Nemesis of Faith raised a scandal at its first release , being referred to as " a manual of infidelity " in the Morning Herald . It was publicly burned by William Sewell in his class at Exeter College . Soon after , Froude resigned his fellowship at Oxford .

The Nemesis of Faith also drew criticism on literary grounds as being melodramatic and sentimental . Froude himself wrote to his friend Charles Kingsley that " I cut a hole in my heart and wrote with the blood " . Thomas Carlyle complained of the novel " Froude ought to consume his own smoke and not trouble other people 's nostrils . " Although recent critics tend to be more positive about the novel 's depiction of Sutherland 's speculative crisis , they have maintained the weakness of the ending , attributing it to Froude 's inability to come to terms with his own doubts .

By contrast , the novel was positively reviewed by such literary figures as George Eliot and Mrs. Humphrey Ward , whose 1888 novel Robert Elsmere was significantly influenced by the novel and by Froude 's life . In a review in the Coventry Herald Eliot wrote that in reading The Nemesis of Faith " we seem to be in companionship with a spirit who is transfusing himself into our souls , and so vitalising them by his superior energy , that life , both outward and inward , presents itself to us in higher relief , in colours brightened and deepened . "

In an effort to reconcile with Oxford , Froude refused to allow republication of The Nemesis of Faith following its second edition , and in 1858 he formally repudiated the novel .

= = Historical context and allusions = =

The 1840s were a turbulent decade in the Church of England . Following the earlier German Higher Critics , who argued for a historical approach to religious texts , David Strauss published *Leben Jesu* or *The Life of Jesus , Critically Examined* which argued that the events of the New Testament were not historical but rather mythical . In 1846 George Eliot published an English translation of *Leben Jesu* which became a source of religious doubts for Froude and many of his contemporaries . Critics have also identified Thomas Carlyle 's novel *Sartor Resartus* and Spinoza as sources of Sutherland 's doubts , and those of many of his contemporaries .

Meanwhile , the Oxford Movement , headed by John Henry Newman as well as Froude 's brother Richard Hurrell Froude , was attacking the Church 's move towards liberalism and secularism , advocating instead a greater emphasis on Catholic doctrine . The Movement provided a serious challenge to Protestant beliefs , with Newman later converting to Roman Catholicism . Although Froude was devoted to Newman for several years , and maintained a sentimental affection for the man ( which he expressed in his essays on Newman and the Oxford Movement ) , he ultimately repudiated his beliefs .

The novel was influenced by Goethe 's *Elective Affinities* , which Froude later translated and published anonymously . Froude borrowed much of his novel 's ending from Goethe , and also used the scientific metaphor underlying Goethe 's novel to illustrate the relation of an individual to the church .