

# Four Religious Books

Reviewed by Philip Cabot

*WHY I AM A CHRISTIAN.* By Dr. Frank Crane. New York: Wm. H. Wise & Co. \$3.00.

*CHRISTIANITY AT THE CROSS ROADS.* By E. Y. Mullins. New York: G. H. Doran Co. \$2.00.

*CHRISTIANITY AND THE STATE.* By S. P. Cadman. New York: The Macmillan Co. \$2.50.

*THE LAST OF THE HERETICS.* By Algernon Sidney Crapsey. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. \$3.50.

THESE four books are what we call religious books; that is, they deal with some aspect of the application of religion to life. As such, they must be measured by an entirely different standard from other literature. For Christians the Bible always has been, and must ever remain, the greatest of all religious books; and as all others derive their inspiration from it, none can speak with as great power. The Bible is the center, or sun, in our religious world, and all other books reflect its light like moons. But, just as the sun is too brilliant to be regarded with the naked eye, so in many moods the Bible is too concentrated to meet our need. Its very brilliance dazzles us; to receive its light we must look rather at some reflection of it. This is the function of the great religious books of subsequent date, and the true test of the importance of such a book is the amount of light which it reflects from the Bible. Those that help us to understand the Bible better are serviceable; those that do not, are useless.

While it may appear in some cases that great religious books written in later times shine like the Bible with their own and not with a reflected light, this is a heresy. The light which they shed upon us is as truly derived from the Bible as the light of a lamp is from the sun. This I believe to be a true standard or touchstone for religious books, and I proceed, therefore, to apply it to the books in question.

Dr. Crane's book entitled "Why I Am a Christian" fails, I think, to meet the test. The title lends color at least to the assumption that Dr. Crane desires to point out to others the road by which the blessed inspiration of the faith of Christ may be reached. But I greatly fear that the reader will be disappointed. While the book bears upon every page the marks of his sincerity of purpose, he seems, in his eagerness, to bring the subject within the mental focus of the average man, to have dragged the religion of the Master out of heaven altogether. His method of treatment has reduced

Christianity from a religion to philosophy or even to a sort of formula by which man may best live during his short space of time in the material world.

IF this is what is wanted in our day, the philosophy of stoic Marcus Aurelius will admirably fill the bill. But this is not what is wanted. Men yearning today to be lifted out of their worries and cleansed of their lusts cannot be fed with a doctrine which draws the spirit down into the street. In his effort to be popular, Dr. Crane has degenerated into materialism. From a literary point of view, the book is seriously defective. The style is bad. It abounds in bad grammar, loose generalizations, and inaccurate statements. Popularity has been degraded from a virtue to an offense. The average man may be ignorant in spiritual matters, but he is no fool and is not flattered by being talked down to.

If a book is to be taken seriously or is to have any permanent value it must be more carefully composed than a newspaper article. The daily newspaper is intended to go into the wastebasket and not into the library, and literary merit is not demanded. But in a book we have a right to expect clear thinking, close reasoning and a skillful use of words. This book is weak in all these. It is pitched in an unimaginative and unspiritual key which will not appeal to young people; and for the cultivated religious mind, it is too verbose to lift or to inspire. To those whom the churches have repelled by the narrow fierceness of their creeds it may bring a ray of light. In spite of its tedious prolixity it may serve as a primer of introduction for the unchurched to the meaning and purpose of Christian worship. But it is a very elementary textbook. It lacks the picturesqueness which holds the reader's interest and makes lasting impression. It is not an important religious book such as will help a man to grasp more clearly the relation of his soul to its Maker.

DR. MULLINS' book, "Christianity at the Cross Roads" sheds darkness instead of light upon the spiritual problems of our world. The arguments and doctrines which he sets forth are undeniable, but he labors them to the point of exhaustion. All that is worth saying in the book could have been better said in one chapter, and the reader who patiently labors through the whole volume is a better man than I if he does not come out darkened instead of enlightened.

Dr. Cadman's book entitled "Christianity and the State" is a scholarly

presentation of an important political question. I have not the pleasure of knowing the worthy doctor, but he must be a very kind-hearted man who never overloads his beasts of burden. But, one fancies, that in the literary art this is a vice and not a virtue. The true artist loads his words to the limit and drives them like galley slaves. Every word is made to do the utmost of which it is capable, and in this way, while the words may be driven hard, the labor of the reader is greatly lightened.

In Dr. Cadman's book one feels that the reader has been sacrificed to the words, and the labor which I spent in reading his book left me in a condition of collapse. As a religious book I cannot recommend it, but if Dr. Cadman will withdraw it as a candidate in this class and retire into the field of politics and history, he may very possibly get a more favorable verdict.

OF the four books, Dr. Crapsey's, "The Last of the Heretics," is the only one I found readable. It is undeniably readable. The style is charming. It flows easily, and one's attention does not flag. But I must confess that, if the doctor's definition of a heretic contained in the preface is accurate, it is hard to see how he can claim to be the last of them. If every man who thinks for himself is a heretic, the supply cannot have been so soon exhausted. There will continue to be heretics as long as there continues to be a world, and, as always has been true in the past, heretics will prove to have been the most useful men of their time. One has the feeling that Dr. Crapsey was a great heretic and, therefore, a great man, but this is far from being a great book. For one thing, he is continually raising questions which he does not answer. The reader's hopes are lighted only to be dashed again. One feels like the pedestrian walking across lots who falls into one hole after another to the great damage of his shins and his equanimity. No literary artist has a right to raise hopes which he does not satisfy. At several points in the book the reader is impressed with the spiritual power of the man. This is particularly true of the letters written at the time Dr. Crapsey was expelled from the church. But the man of truly great spiritual stature is always a humble man. Conceit is impossible to the saint. The man who is great as a spiritual leader of men is always humble in the sight of God. The quality which makes him great as a spiritual leader is a true sense of perspective of the universe.

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His grasp of the gigantic dimensions of the universe is so accurate that he sees himself for what he is, a mere grain of dust, and, as such, he is not tempted to exaggerate his own importance. But I find running through this autobiography of Dr. Crapsey a certain acidity which destroys the flavor of it. The man is unable completely to conceal the fact that his feelings have been hurt. It is probably true that he was badly treated, but it does not lie in his mouth to say so. This should come from another quarter. And so I conclude that, according to the standard which I established at the outset, none of these books adds anything important to the illumination which the Bible sheds upon us. They are not moons which reflect the sun's light, but, at best, sun dogs with which we can dispense.

THE RUMFORD PRESS  
CONCORD