

**SOME LOOSE STONES: BEING A
CONSIDERATION OF CERTAIN
TENDENCIES IN MODERN THEOLOGY,
ILLUSTRATED BY REFERENCE TO THE
BOOK CALLED "FOUNDATIONS"**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649003006

Some loose stones: being a consideration of certain tendencies in modern theology, illustrated by reference to the book called "Foundations" by R. A. Knox

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

www.triestepublishing.com

R. A. KNOX

**SOME LOOSE STONES: BEING A
CONSIDERATION OF CERTAIN
TENDENCIES IN MODERN THEOLOGY,
ILLUSTRATED BY REFERENCE TO THE
BOOK CALLED "FOUNDATIONS"**

SOME LOOSE STONES

BEING A CONSIDERATION OF CERTAIN
TENDENCIES IN MODERN THEOLOGY
ILLUSTRATED BY REFERENCE TO THE
BOOK CALLED

“ FOUNDATIONS ”

BY

R. A. KNOX

FELLOW AND CHAPLAIN OF TRINITY COLLEGE, OXFORD



THIRD IMPRESSION

LONGMANS, GREEN, AND CO.

39 PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON
NEW YORK, BOMBAY, AND CALCUTTA

1914

All rights reserved

SEDI
SAPIENTIAE



PREFACE

SILENCE, in print, is a virtue rarely found where theology is in question. But there comes a point at which, as with the fags watching the football-match in "Tom Brown," the worst-equipped onlooker becomes impatient, and must needs rush into the fray, at whatever peril of ridicule, in his shirt-sleeves.

This is not a theological book. I have no claim and no competence to write a theological book. It should rather be called a study in psychology. For we are never allowed to forget, nowadays, that psychology is the key to everything, more especially in matters of religion. We investigate the psychology of the Prophets, or of the Apostles, or of the Fathers, or of the Schoolmen, or of the Deists; and even (God forgive us) the psychology of Jesus of Nazareth. This book purports to open up new ground by investigating a far more intricate psychology—that of the modern theologian. The great argument used now against any theological proposition is not, that it is untrue, or unthinkable, or unedifying, or unscriptural, or unorthodox, but simply, that the modern mind cannot accept it. It is the modern mind that accepts this and rejects that, that expresses itself in terms of A rather than in terms of B, that thinks along these lines rather than along those,

that shrinks, or ratifies, or demands. And after reading a few paragraphs of such ostensibly psychological discussion, I find myself sorely tempted to exclaim, in an equally psychological spirit: "If the modern mind has really got all these peculiar kinks about it, then, in Heaven's name, let us trepan it."

The history of the present work is as follows. About two years ago I was privileged by an invitation to join a sort of Eranos, a body of eight Oxford Fellows who met in each others' rooms, on Fridays throughout the term, for Sext, luncheon, and None. It had included, I think, all, and still includes several, of the Seven Oxford Men who wrote "Foundations." I was aware of the imminence of that production; and long before its appearance set about writing a parody of Dryden's "Absalom and Achitophel" to greet its birth. The parody, which appeared in the "Oxford Magazine" almost immediately after the book itself had been published, laid itself open to two criticisms. Old-fashioned theologians, who were distressed at recent evidences of the trend of modern theology, asked why I couldn't attack the book in earnest. More "Liberal" thinkers were under the impression that there was something cowardly about a style of criticism which, after the manner of guerilla warfare, hid itself behind the rock of Satire and discharged irresponsible shots into the somewhat broad target presented to it. There is only one way of satisfying both criticisms, which was not then open to me, as I had not read "Foundations" itself; and that is to write a serious criticism of it.

But I repeat, it is in the first instance psychological, not theological. This description must not be taken to imply any truckling to Pragmatism, a philosophy

which all good men rightly reject. If a position is stated in cold logical form, clothed in words that represent the truth as nearly as a man can express it, then it is nonsense to enquire who the man is, what is his ancestry and station in life, or his views on other matters. Nobody wants a biography of Euclid. But "Foundations," in spite of the fact that it was launched on the world with something of the solemnity of a manifesto, does not seem to me a plain logical statement. Many of us would agree that he who teacheth ought to wait on his teaching, and he that exhorteth on his exhortation. But the teaching of "Foundations" is so interwoven with exhortation that the plain reader is likely to lose his way in it. The very language is largely unfamiliar to him. Words like "static," "corporate," "inclusive," "experience," above all, "restatement" recur continually, jarring upon the ear with the strangeness of a partially understood dialect, hypnotizing rather than enlightening us. We have to face a new vocabulary and a new atmosphere, wholly modern and largely "Oxford." And this book is an attempt to get behind that vocabulary, that atmosphere, and point out in language as simple as I can make it where this modern theology is carrying us, and why (in my thinking) it is hopelessly discontinuous with the tendencies of historic Christianity.

I am aware that the position I adopt is likely to be described as obscurantist. If obscurantism means a tendency to obscure things, that is, to conceal the importance of things which one knows to be true, then I cannot plead guilty to the charge; indeed, it seems that nowadays it is the "Liberal" thinker who

is far more tempted to practise economy in his representation of the truth. It is the Liberal who makes his appeal to the practical necessities of religion, rather than to abstract truth. He is content to reduce the deposit of faith to the smallest possible dimensions, in order to attract the largest possible number of converts. It is the "obscurantist," oddly enough, who goes up to the house-top, and speaks in the light that which he has heard in darkness; acquiring by his importunity some of the unpopularity which must attach to a theological *enfant terrible*.

But if obscurantism is simply to believe, that there are limits defined by authority, within which theorizing is unnecessary and speculation forbidden; that there are some religious principles of such a priori certainty, that any evidence which appears to conflict with them does not destroy them, as it would destroy a mere hypothesis, but by conflicting with them proves itself to have been erroneously or inadequately interpreted, then I would welcome the title, contenting myself with the remark, firstly that all of us, except the blindest agnostics, do in fact hold such a priori principles on certain questions, and secondly that if we did not religion could never be a practical thing, because a continual flux of first principles is (as a matter of observation) necessarily incompatible with any stable development of the spiritual life. I suppose therefore that the "obscurantist" is not one who takes things for granted, but one who takes too much for granted. I hope in the following pages to discuss the delimitation of that province.

But I should like here to enter a protest against