

**DIVINE IMMANENCE; AN
ESSAY ON THE SPIRITUAL
SIGNIFICANCE OF MATTER**

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Divine immanence; an essay on the spiritual significance of matter by J. R. Illingworth

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DIVINE IMMANENCE

AN ESSAY

ON

THE SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE OF MATTER

BY

J. R. ILLINGWORTH, M.A.

AUTHOR OF 'PERSONALITY HUMAN AND DIVINE'

Οἷον γὰρ ἕκαστόν ἐστι τῆς γενέσεως τελεσθεισῆς, ταῦτα φανέν
τὴν φύσιν εἶναι ἕκαστου.—ARIST. *Pol.*

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PREFACE

MUCH of the best philosophical writing in England, of late years, has been critical, or, in the technical and proper sense of the word, sceptical. But critical and sceptical phases, in the progress of thought, can never, from their very nature, be other than temporary things: they sift and question the constructions of the past; but only with a view to prepare for those that are to come. For the world, after all, is a fact; sun, moon, and stars are real; men and women live and love; the moral law is strong;—in a word, the universe exists, and some positive account of it must needs be true; it can never be finally explained by a negation. Hence the result of recent criticism has been to make the need of reconstruction more apparent; and men are consequently feeling, in various directions, after positive, synthetic ways of thought.

The following brief essay is not an attempt to make any new or original contribution toward such thought: but it is written in the interest of synthesis,

and aims at combining some ideas, which are familiar enough in themselves, but are not always viewed in combination—ideas on the relation of nature to religion. For one love, amid all our discord, unites the modern world; we all of us love nature in our several ways; men of science, poets, painters, men of religion, men of affairs, are equally affected by its spell—the wonder of its processes, the glory of its aspect, the contrast of its calmness to the coil of human care. And with this feeling for nature—which, we are probably right in supposing, was never so widely diffused as at the present day—comes an increased susceptibility to those spiritual emotions which the presence of nature inspires, and which lie at the root of what we call natural religion. The sense of natural religion is therefore strong in the modern mind; and this of itself is an important step towards positive, constructive belief. But we, of later ages, for whom history has happened, can never again revert to a mere religion of nature; any more than to a state of nature, in society, or policy, or morals. For we have learned, from nature itself, that the law of life is evolution, and that evolution means an increase of distinctive form. Religion, like all other things, must have become, as in fact it has become, increasingly articulate with the process of the years; its development more definite, or, in religious language, its revelation more precise. And the plea of

this essay is that the Incarnation is the congruous climax of such development; that the more we analyse natural religion, the more it tends to such an issue; while conversely the Incarnation presupposes such a past. This is no more, of course, than theologians, in all ages, have maintained; and to many readers, therefore, it may seem a commonplace. But its restatement will, perhaps, be permitted for the benefit of those who are more attracted by the question than acquainted with its history; in the hope that some who, under modern influence, have felt the fascination of natural religion, may be led to recognize its culmination in the Christian creed.

As this essay is in some sense a sequel to my lectures on 'Personality'—being a further application of the same line of thought—I have here assumed certain positions, which are there defended at length; and at the same time enlarged upon certain others—more especially in the Appendix—which seemed, in their present connexion, to need further emphasis.