

A THEORY OF CONDUCT

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A Theory of Conduct by Archibald Alexander

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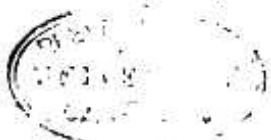
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BY

ARCHIBALD ALEXANDER

FORMERLY PROFESSOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN
COLUMBIA COLLEGE

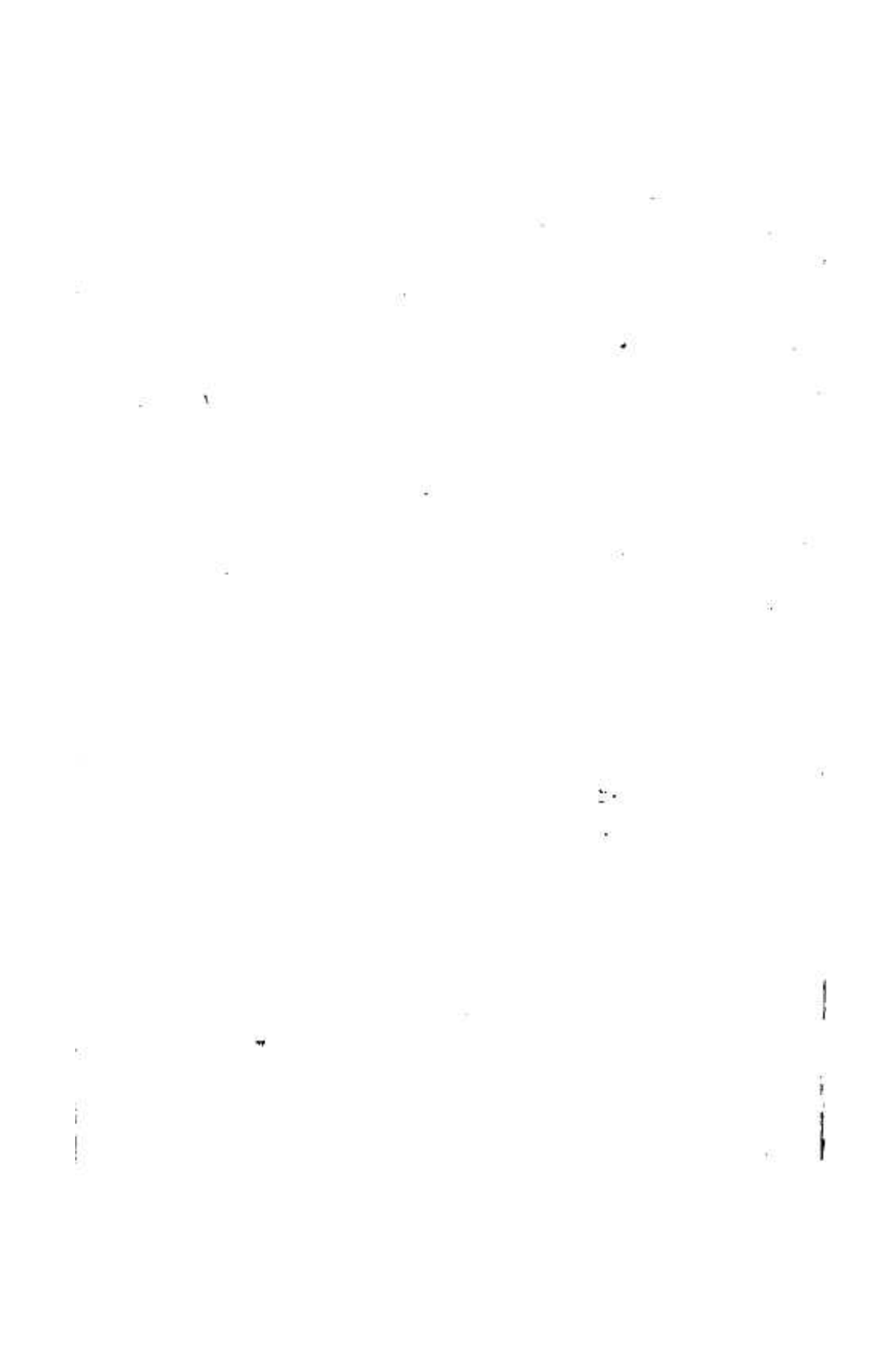


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CONTENTS.

	PAGE
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. THE THEORY OF RIGHT	20
III. THE THEORY OF DUTY	46
IV. THE NATURE OF CHARACTER	58
V. THE MOTIVE TO MORALITY	80





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I.

Introduction.

WITHIN the last few years there has been an unusual interest awakened in moral science. The causes of this are not hard to discover. In the first place, the history of philosophy shows that where a decay of belief in the popular religion is manifested among the more intellectual classes, there is likely to be a demand for something to take the place of the popular religion. This demand is usually supplied by systems of morality which are often merely dogmatic guides for practical life. For example, the philosophy before Socrates, which was chiefly physical,

and the philosophy of the Socratic period, which was mainly metaphysical, were followed by the very practical systems of the Stoics, the Epicureans, and Skeptics, who sought to solve the problem of life and to present a philosophy of character. The systematic philosophy which supplanted the mythology of Greece, the popular creeds associated with the Olympian gods, had in some cases silenced the oracles, in others aroused doubts as to the reality of the heroic and dramatic figures of Homer and Æschylus. The Theogony of Hesiod was at length received with incredulity in later times, and new shrines and forms of worship had to be constructed to take the place of those which no longer attracted their devotees. Just as the pre-Sophistic thinkers had rested unsatisfied with a mythological explanation of Nature, and had set forth a science of the elements or an atomic theory; so the post-Aristotelian thinkers looked askance at oracles and auguries, and applied, ac-