

CONSCIENCE

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Conscience by George Winston Reid

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GEORGE WINSTON REID

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"No intellectual man will enter on any study for its own sake, but only with a view to advance himself in that one sole science which embraces all."—PLATO.

NEW YORK
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1905

PREFACE.

To my sister Florence my thanks are due, for her constant encouragement and assistance during the composition of this work.

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INTRODUCTION.

One summer night the steamer upon which we had embarked for a visit to Japan's beauty-renowned Inland Sea was anchored in the harbor of Kobe. The dark waters were streaked here and there with the bright reflections of the lights of many vessels; fantastic lanterns of the natives gleamed in the town that stretched along the shore of the harbor; low mountains in the background of the town cast their deep shadows; and overhead myriads of stars shed their faint light upon the night scene. Several hours after I had retired, I was awakened by the steamer's starting upon its course, and went to the port-hole for a parting glance at Kobe. How transformed the scene! A portion of the town was in flames! In place of the many pale lights in the darkness, one great mass of fire now stood forth, and shed a weird glare upon the surroundings. High above the roofs of dwellings and temples swept the fiery element, majestic, irresistible, claiming all in its path as its own. The steamer soon turned and the town could no longer be seen. But on the eastern horizon there appeared another streak of flame: in a short time the sun rose above the surface of the sea, as a great ball of fire. The same element that had just before been seen as the power of transformation and destruction, now

shone in all its dazzling glory as the kindly source of light and of life to the earth.

As never before I felt the presence in Nature of a force that was overwhelmingly grand and mysterious. What was this power which could transform and destroy all things, and yet, in the sun, could give us our very life? Fire is the power of creation as well as of destruction. If all things can be transformed by fire into its own nature, then all things have sprung from fire. The universe has arisen as transformations of nebulae of fire in space.

“Science has as yet furnished no explanation for the existence of force or matter. The appearance of life in the world is just as unexplained and baffling as the presence of force and matter themselves. But life probably existed in the cosmos long before consciousness, and the advent of consciousness is again as bewilderingly unaccounted for as that of life or force or matter.”¹

“The hypothesis that light is transmitted by wave motion . . . evidently necessitates the hypothesis of a medium in which these waves are propagated through space. Various views of the constitution of this medium — known as the luminiferous ether — have been advanced by eminent physicists. Some of the properties attributed to this hypothetical fluid are so anomalous that it is almost impossible for the mind to conceive the existence of such a medium. . . . ‘The luminiferous ether pervading all space is not

¹Kelly, *Evolution and Effort*.