

**OUR PLACE AMONG INFINITIES. A  
SERIES OF ESSAYS CONTRASTING OUR  
LITTLE ABODE IN SPACE AND TIME  
WITH THE INFINITIES AROUND US; TO  
WHICH ARE ADDED ESSAYS ON THE  
JEWISH SABBATH AND ASTROLOGY**

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Our Place Among Infinities. A Series of Essays Contrasting Our Little Abode in Space and Time with the Infinities Around Us; To Which Are Added Essays on the Jewish Sabbath and Astrology by Richd. A. Proctor

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**RICHD. A. PROCTOR**

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TIME WITH THE INFINITIES AROUND US.

TO WHICH ARE ADDED ESSAYS ON

## THE JEWISH SABBATH AND ASTROLOGY.

BY

RICHD. A. PROCTOR,

AUTHOR OF "SATURN AND ITS SYSTEM," "THE UNIVERSE," "THE EXPANSE  
OF HEAVEN," ETC., ETC.

"Nous n'avons point la mesure de cette machine immense; nous n'en pouvons  
calculer les rapports; nous n'en connaissons ni les premières lois, ni la cause finale."—  
J. J. ROUSSEAU.

"Freue dich, höchstes Geschöpf der Natur, du fühltest dich fähig,  
Ihr den höchsten Gedanken, zu dem sie schaffend sich aufschwang,  
Nachzudenken."

GOETHE.

NEW YORK:  
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1876.

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## PREFACE.

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THIS work takes its name from the essays occupying the first seventy pages of the book ; but the later essays, as shewing the nature of those parts of the universe which lie nearest to us, are properly included under the same title. Even those on Astrology and the Jewish Sabbath belong to the discussion of our place among infinities ; for it was their ignorance of the earth's place among infinities, which led the ancients to regard the heavenly bodies as ruling, favourably or adversely, the fates of men and nations, and to dedicate the days in sets of seven to the seven planets of their astrological system.

It will be seen, that my views respecting the interesting question of life in other worlds have changed considerably since I wrote the work bearing that title. I still consider that work a sound exposition of the theory of the plurality of worlds, though I consider that the weight of evidence favours my theory of the (relative) paucity of worlds.

RICHD. A. PROCTOR.

*Sept. 27, 1875.*

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NOTE --Most of these Essays have been reprinted from current periodicals.





## OUR PLACE AMONG INFINITIES.

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### THE PAST AND FUTURE OF OUR EARTH.\*

" Ut his exordia primis  
Omnia, et ipse tener *Mundi* concreverit orbis.  
Tum durare solum, et discludere Nerea ponto  
Cœperit, et rerum paullatim sumere formas."  
VIRGIL.

THE subject with which I am about to deal is associated by many with questions of religion. Let me premise, however, that I do not thus view it myself. It seems to me impossible to obtain from science any clear ideas respecting the ways or nature of the Deity, or even respecting the reality of an Almighty personal God. Science deals with the finite though it may carry our thoughts to the infinite. Infinity of space and of matter occupying space, of time and of the processes with which time is occupied, and infinity of energy as necessarily implied by the infinities of matter and of the operations

\* This essay presents the substance of a lecture delivered in New York on April 3, 1874, being the first of a subsidiary series in which, of set purpose (and in accordance with the request of several esteemed friends), I dealt less with the direct teachings of astronomy, which had occupied me in a former series, than with ideas suggested by astronomical facts, and more particularly by the discoveries made during the last quarter of a century.

affecting matter,—these infinities science brings clearly before us. For science directs our thoughts to the finites to which these infinites correspond. It shows us that there can be no conceivable limits to space or time, and though finiteness of matter or of operation may be conceivable, there is manifest incongruity in assuming an infinite disproportion between unoccupied and occupied space, or between void time and time occupied with the occurrence of events of what sort soever. So that the teachings of science bring us into the presence of the unquestionable infinities of time and of space, and the presumable infinities of matter and of operation,—hence, therefore, into the presence of infinity of energy. But science teaches us nothing about these infinities, as such. They remain none the less inconceivable, however clearly we may be taught to recognise their reality. Moreover, these infinites, including the infinity of energy, are material infinities. Science tells us nothing of the infinite attributes of an Almighty Being; it presents to us no personal infinites, whether of Power, Beneficence, or Wisdom. Science may suggest some ideas on these points; though we perceive daily more and more clearly that it is unsafe to accept as her teaching ideas which commonly derive their colouring from our own prepossessions. And assuredly, as respects actual facts, Science in so far as she presents personal infinity to us at all, presents it as an inconceivable, like those other inconceivable infinities, with the finites corresponding to which her operations are alone directly concerned. To speak in plain terms—so far as Science

is concerned, the idea of a personal God is inconceivable,\* as are all the attributes which religion recognizes in such a Being. On the other hand, it should be admitted as distinctly, that Science no more disproves the existence of infinite personal power or wisdom than she disproves the existence of infinite material energy (which on the contrary must be regarded as probable) or the existence of infinite space or time (which must be regarded as certain).

So much premised, we may proceed to inquire into the probable past and future of our earth, as calmly as we should inquire into the probable past and future of a pebble, a weed, or an insect, of a rock, a tree, or an animal, of a continent, or of a type—whether of vegetable or of animal life. The beginning of all things is not to be reached, not appreciably to be even approached, by a few steps backward in imagination, nor the end of all things by a few steps forward. Such a thought is as unfounded as was the fear of men in old times that by travelling too far in any direction they might pass over the earth's edge and be plunged into the abyss beyond, as unreasonable

\* I mean these words to be understood literally. To the man of science, observing the operation of second causes in every process with which his researches deal, and finding no limit to the operation of such causes however far back he may trace the chain of causation, the idea of a first cause is as inconceivable in its relation to observed scientific facts as is the idea of infinite space in its relation to the finite space to which the observations of science extend. Yet infinite space must be admitted; nor do I see how even that man of science who would limit his thoughts most rigidly to facts, can admit that all things are of which he thinks, without having impressed upon him the feeling that, in some way he cannot understand, these things represent the operation of Infinite Purpose. Assuredly we do not avoid the inconceivable by assuming as at least possible that matter exists only as it affects our perceptions.