

# **ASPECTS OF THEISM**

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Aspects of theism by William Knight

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**WILLIAM KNIGHT**

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OF THEISM**



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BY

WILLIAM KNIGHT, LL.D.

PROFESSOR OF MORAL PHILOSOPHY IN THE UNIVERSITY OF ST. ANDREWS

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## PREFACE

IN the year 1870, I gave a course of twelve lectures in Dundee, on the subject of Theism. These were mainly historical, and were intended to be wrought out more fully for publication; but the pressure of other interests prevented the completion of this project. Most of the conclusions reached were embodied in an article published in *The British Quarterly Review* in July 1871, and afterwards included in a volume of *Studies in Philosophy and Literature* (1879). In 1890 I was asked to give a short course of lectures on the same subject to the Theological College at Salisbury. These I repeated in London in 1891.

In the present volume these lectures are enlarged, with several addenda. It contains little of the

history of the proofs, which I endeavoured to trace in detail, in 1868 ; but it discusses the problem of Theism under aspects which may perhaps be more useful at the present time. In any case, it is for the student of Theology, rather than of Philosophy, to supply the former—which remains a desideratum in our British literature.

It is obvious that, to understand the precise nature of the problem, and what has really to be proved, is an indispensable preliminary to any solution of it ; and, while I believe—and have tried in the following pages to show—that the theistic interpretation of the Universe is the most luminous, the most comprehensive, and the least likely to be undermined by future critical assault, I at the same time suggest that we should include much within it, which has at times been excluded, and even supposed to be antagonistic.

It is scarcely necessary to add that it is impossible to deal with the problem, either as one of experience or of history, while ignoring its philosophical basis. Just as a psychology—whether psychical or physiological—which ignores metaphysic, is disqualified, at the outset, from reaching conclusions which the human race can ultimately endorse ; so a Theism,



which dispenses with Philosophy, can have neither an adequate basis nor a root of endurance. If based on mere authority, or unsifted dogma, it can have no evidential warrant that is trustworthy or lasting. I have treated it throughout these pages as a problem of Philosophy.

It was my original intention to fill the latter half of the volume with "notes," referring to the literature of the subject; and, with this end in view, I have kept it back for two years. That literature, however, is so vast, and is becoming so increasingly complex, that I have thought it better to print these *Aspects of Theism*<sup>1</sup> very much as they were spoken, and to offer them without notes, as a short study of a great problem. Something in the way of history may be written by and by.

The discussion of the subject has brought me into partial antagonism with men whom I greatly honour, with friends deceased, and many contemporaries of eminence. It is difficult to exaggerate the debt we owe—in Criticism, Philosophy, and Science—to such writers as the late Mr. Matthew Arnold, Mr. Spencer, Mr. Huxley, Mr. Tyndall, and others, from whose

<sup>1</sup> This was the title under which the lectures were originally delivered.

opinion, on ultimate problems I nevertheless dissent. My appreciation of their work is not to be measured by the extent of the speculative difference which separates us.

W. K.

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