

**IS GOD
KNOWABLE**

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Is God knowable by J. Iverach

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I.

STATEMENT OF THE QUESTION.

IT is the question of the hour. On all sides and in all forms it is continually cropping up. A negative answer has been given to it, in the interests of orthodoxy itself, and the arguments of the orthodox professor have been borrowed by the apostle of nescience, and made to serve as the foundation of a system, in which all our knowledge and experience are only the working out of equations by symbols which themselves remain unknown. A negative answer is given in the interests of science, on the plea that the solution of the problem is impossible, and attention given to it is sheer waste of time. A negative answer is given in the interests of philosophy, because it is said that the duty of philosophy, and its only task, is to elaborate into a system the general principles which are common to all the sciences, and thus to be the science of science.

On the other hand, affirmative answers of many kinds have been given. One set of answers proceeds on the obliteration of all distinctions between God and the world, and God becomes a name synonymous with nature and with the universe. He becomes the Universal Spirit and the Universal Force, or He is hidden under some other name, which excludes from view all those personal attri-

butes which once were thought to be characteristic of Him. Another set of answers takes up the burden in all its weight. They affirm regarding God that He is spirit, personal, self-conscious, and capable of entering into personal relations with finite spirits, and that He may be known in a very true and real sense of the word Knowledge. This is the thesis we seek to maintain. We shall seek the help of all those who have made an affirmative answer so far as the answer is affirmative; we shall have to part company when they become negativists, and proceed on our journey without them. We shall gladly recognise that there is "a stream of tendency in the universe" by which all things fulfil the law of their being, which also makes for righteousness; we shall gladly recognise the great fact that thought is in the universe, and that the relations of things are relations of thought; we shall accept the fact of the immanence of the universal spirit and of the consciousness of finite spirit as elements of truth in our argument; but we shall seek to advance when these stop short, and we shall try to show that all these partial affirmations have significance and can demand standing-ground only when we make a further advance, and affirm the existence and working of a free, personal, self-conscious Spirit, who can enter into most intimate fellowship with His creatures.

It is necessary at the outset to state the meaning of the terms we are to use. In the question, "Is God knowable?" there are two words which need to be defined. We shall begin with the word "knowledge." We shall not enter into the numerous problems of a metaphysical kind which, still awaiting solution, cluster round the word "knowledge;" we take for granted that knowledge is possible, although we may not be able to explain how it is possible, nor exactly to show how much of actual knowledge depends

on the knowing subject, and how much on the object known, and what is the exact proportion and relation between the two. Certain aspects of these questions will need to be discussed in the sequel; at present we assume the unquestioned fact that men actually do know. There is a body of verified knowledge lying close at hand in those formulated results of human experience which we name the sciences. In them we have a body of ascertained truth regarding which there is no question or any room for doubt. When, however, we pass beyond that defined region, and inquire into the pre-suppositions on which science is based, we enter into a region where there is room for controversy, doubt, and denial. Still further is there room for controversy when we pass into the penumbra of speculation, which stretches far and wide on every side around the firm land of science. There may be solid land, there may only be a cloud-land, only further research can tell.

There is, then, no distrust of science to be shown in these pages. Its method and its results are worthy of all praise and of all gratitude, if only we recognise their due limits. A calm consideration of them must lead to the conclusion that there are problems set to us by our own knowledge and experience which are utterly insoluble by the methods of science as these are expounded and applied. We find these methods quite adequate to the explanation of the laws and processes of the inorganic world, though even in that department we hear from the highest authorities the mournful complaint that they know so little of the nature of matter. The progress which has already been made, and the rapid march of discovery in the physical sciences, leave no room for doubt that in this sphere at least we have got possession of a method which is