

**THE IDEA OF GOD AS
AFFECTED BY
MODERN KNOWLEDGE**

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The Idea of God as Affected by Modern Knowledge by John Fiske

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By Mr. Fiske.

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By JOHN FISKE



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TWENTY-FIRST THOUSAND.

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To
MY WIFE,

IN REMEMBRANCE OF THE SWEET SUNDAY MORNING
UNDER THE APPLE-TREE ON THE HILLSIDE,
WHEN WE TWO SAT LOOKING DOWN INTO FAIRY WOODLAND PATHS,
AND TALKED OF THE THINGS
SINCE WRITTEN IN THIS LITTLE BOOK,
I now dedicate it.


Ἀργύριος καὶ χρυσίος οὐχ ἐπάρατοι
μοι· ὁ δὲ ἔχει, τοῦτό σοι δίδωμι.





PREFACE.



HEN asked to give a second address before the Concord School of Philosophy, I gladly accepted the invitation, as affording a proper occasion for saying certain things which I had for some time wished to say about theism. My address was designed to introduce the discussion of the question whether pantheism is the legitimate outcome of modern science. It seemed to me that the object might best be attained by passing in review the various modifications which the idea of God has undergone in the past, and pointing out the shape in which it is likely to survive the rapid growth of modern knowledge, and especially the establishment of that great doctrine of evolution which is fast obliging us to revise

our opinions upon all subjects whatsoever. Having thus in the text outlined the idea of God most likely to be conceived by minds trained in the doctrine of evolution, I left it for further discussion to decide whether the term "pantheism" can properly be applied to such a conception. While much enlightenment may be got from carefully describing the substance of a philosophic doctrine, very little can be gained by merely affixing to it a label; and I could not but feel that my argument would be simply encumbered by the introduction of any question of nomenclature involving such a vague and uninformative epithet as "pantheism." Such epithets are often regarded with favour and freely used, as seeming to obviate the necessity for that kind of labour to which most people are most averse, — the labour of sustained and accurate thinking. People are too apt to make such general terms do duty in place of a careful examination of facts, and are thus sometimes led to

strange conclusions. When, for example, they have heard somebody called an "agnostic," they at once think they know all about him ; whereas they have very likely learned nothing that is of the slightest value in characterizing his opinions or his mental attitude. A term that can be applied at once to a Comte, a Mansel, and a Huxley is obviously of little use in the matter of definition. But, it may be asked, in spite of their world-wide differences, do not these three thinkers agree in holding that nothing can be known about the nature of God? Perhaps so, — one cannot answer even this plain question with an unqualified yes ; but, granting that they fully agree in this assertion of ignorance, nevertheless, in their philosophic attitudes with regard to this ignorance, in the use they severally make of the assertion, in the way it determines their inferences about all manner of other things, the differences are so vast that nothing but mental confusion can come from a terminology which would