

**RECENT TENDENCIES IN
ETHICS: THREE
LECTURES TO CLERGY,
GIVEN AT CAMBRIDGE**

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Recent Tendencies in Ethics: Three Lectures to Clergy, given at Cambridge by W. R. Sorley

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W. R. SORLEY

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*THREE LECTURES TO CLERGY
GIVEN AT CAMBRIDGE*

BY
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1817

PREFACE.

THESE lectures were given to a summer meeting of clergy, held at Cambridge in the month of July last. Some passages have been added as they were written out for the press, and the crudities of the spoken word have, I hope, been pruned away; but, in other respects, the original plan of the lectures has been retained. They are now published in the hope that they may prove of interest to those who heard them, and to others who may desire an account, in short compass and in popular form, of some leading features of the ethical thought of the present day.

1817

It is inevitable for such an account to be controversial: otherwise it could not give a true picture of contemporary opinion. Intellectual and social causes have conspired to accentuate traditional differences in ethics, and to make the questions in dispute penetrate to the very heart of morality. It has been my aim to trace the new influences which are at work, and to estimate the value of the ethical doctrines to which they have seemed to lead. The estimate has taken the form of a criticism, but the criticism is in the interests of construction.

W. R. SORLEY.

CAMBRIDGE, *7th March* 1904.

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RECENT TENDENCIES IN ETHICS.

I.

CHARACTERISTICS.

A SURVEY of ethical thought, especially English ethical thought, during the last century would have to lay stress upon one characteristic feature. It was limited in range,—limited, one may say, by its regard for the importance of the facts with which it had to deal. The thought of the period was certainly not without controversy; it was indeed controversial almost to a fault. But the controversies of the time centred almost exclusively round two questions: the question of the origin of moral ideas, and the question of the criterion of moral value.