

**PHILOSOPHY OF THEISM: BEING
THE GIFFORD LECTURES DELIVERED
BEFORE THE UNIVERSITY OF
EDINBURGH IN 1894-95; FIRST
SERIES. [LONDON-1895]**

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BEING

THE GIFFORD LECTURES

DELIVERED BEFORE THE UNIVERSITY
OF EDINBURGH IN 1894-95

FIRST SERIES

BY

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PHILOSOPHY OF THEISM.

LECTURE I.

THE FINAL PROBLEM.

My first words must give expression to the emotion Personal. which I feel on finding myself once more admitted to speak officially within the walls of this ancient university, with which, as student, graduate, and professor, I have been connected for sixty years. For it is sixty years in this November since I first cast eyes of wonder on the academic walls which now carry so many memories in my mind, and which to-day are associated with an extraordinary responsibility. In the evening of life, in reluctant response to the unexpected invitation of the patrons of the Gifford Trust, I find myself, in the presence of my countrymen, called to say honestly the best that may be in me concerning the supreme problem of human life, our relation to which at last determines the answers to all questions which

can engage the mind of man. No words that I can find are sufficient to represent my sense of the honour thus conferred, or the responsibility thus imposed, upon one who believed that he had bid a final farewell to appearances in public of this sort, in order to wind up his account with this mysterious life of sense.

The final
problem
and
Simonides.

It is an appalling problem which confronts me, and, indeed, confronts us all, for all must dispose of it in the conduct of life; and I am now required to handle it intellectually. One may not be ready to say with Pliny, that all religions are the offspring of human weakness and fear; and that what God is, if indeed God be anything distinct from the world in which we find ourselves, it is beyond man's understanding to know. Yet even the boldest thinker, when confronted by the ultimate problem of existence, may well desire to imitate the philosophic caution of Simonides, when he was asked, What God was?—in first demanding a day to think about the answer, then two days more, and after that continuously doubling the required time, when the time already granted had come to an end; but without ever finding that he was able to produce the required answer;—rather becoming more apt to suspect that the answer carried him beyond the range of human intelligence. Often in the course of these last months I have wished that I could indulge in this prudent procrastination, taking not more days only but more years to ponder this infinite problem. But

after the threescore years and ten, this is a forbidden alternative, if I am to speak in this place at all. I see now near at hand

"The shadow cloak'd from head to foot,
Who keeps the keys of all the creeds."

It is the ultimate problem about the universe that is at the heart of a philosophical Theism. The ideal of this Theology is "the true intellectual system of the universe," as Cudworth puts it. It virtually asks what this illimitable aggregate of ever-changing things and persons really means, if indeed it means anything. What is the deepest and truest interpretation that can be put by man upon the immeasurable actuality in which I found myself participating when I became percipient, and with which I have been in contact and collision ever since I began to be conscious? This is, surely, the most universally human question that can be raised: no man can escape from giving some sort of response to it, consciously or unconsciously, in his life if not in speculative thought. "In what sort of environment, and for what purpose, do I exist?" might be taken as the form in which the final question about the universe of reality expresses itself, when it is looked at on its human side. What finally is this universe, to a dim perception of which I awoke when I became conscious, and in which I am now struggling? It seems to be for ever changing the appearances it presents to me. What may be the origin and outcome

Form in which the final problem of the universe may be expressed.

of this endless flux? Is the principle which finally determines all events reasonable, trustworthy, divine? or is the universe, on the whole and in the end, chaotic and misleading, with a transitory semblance of physical order only? or must I remain for ever ignorant about this, and therefore unable to adopt either of those alternatives? And if I adopt one of them, do I thus get any light shed upon my present duties, or upon my final destiny, as myself a part of the mysterious Whole?

The ultimate problem disturbs modern thought.

It is this problem of the ultimate meaning and purpose of the universe, or whether indeed there is any purpose or meaning in it, human or other, that, as I have said, lies at the heart of the subject that has been handed over to Gifford lecturers, for free but always reverential discussion. It is a many-sided problem, which each lecturer is expected to discuss at his own point of view, with the advantage to truth of its being thus looked at on many sides—a problem, too, that is surely more than usually disturbing thought and faith in this outspeaking era of European and American civilisation.

Lord Gifford's instructions for dealing with it.

When I engaged in this work, I turned to Lord Gifford's Deed of Bequest, in the hope that it might contain articulate directions with regard to the object-matter to be investigated, the intended method of investigation, and the chief end of the proposed inquiry. I found, under each of these three heads, particular instructions, but more or less ambiguous.

It may be convenient to consider them in this opening lecture, as an introduction to the present course. It is a form of introduction that is perhaps not uncalled for by popular misconceptions about what we have got to do, and about the method of doing it, which criticism of former Gifford lecturers has brought to light.

As regards the matter of inquiry, it is an object absolutely unique that is put before us. Indeed, in the ordinary sense of the term, it cannot well be spoken of as an "object" at all; for it cannot be made visible and tangible; nor is it finite, as all objects studied in the natural sciences must be, and as the word *object* itself seems to imply. This unique object, if object it may be called, is thus spoken of in the Deed of Foundation:—"God, the Infinite, the All, the First and Only Cause, the One and the Sole Substance, the Sole Being, the Sole Reality, and the Sole Existence"; more particularly, "the nature and attributes of God," and "the relations which men and the whole universe bear to God." "Science" of all this is "Natural Theology in the widest sense of the term." Such at least is Lord Gifford's definition of this sort of Natural Theology.

Next I am told something about the method of procedure in conducting this unique investigation concerning the Infinite Reality. For it is strict scientific method that is enjoined, according to the analogy of the natural sciences, unrestrained except by evidence,

It is the Infinite Being, and so an absolutely unique object, that we have to inquire about.

The Infinite Being is to be inquired about in scientific method and spirit.