

**BOYLE LECTURES, 1876. WHAT IS  
NATURAL THEOLOGY? AN  
ATTEMPT TO ESTIMATE THE  
CUMULATIVE EVIDENCE OF  
MANY WITNESSES TO GOD**

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WHAT IS NATURAL THEOLOGY?

AN ATTEMPT TO ESTIMATE

THE CUMULATIVE EVIDENCE

OF

MANY WITNESSES TO GOD.

BY

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## PREFACE.

THE Lectures here published were in substance delivered as the Boyle Lectures of 1876. But, on the one hand, they have been since considerably enlarged, and in part rewritten for publication, in order to obviate the limitations imposed by homiletical delivery on the development of various parts of the argument: and, on the other, they contain what has long in principle engaged my best thought and study.

In considering (as a Boyle Lecturer is bound to do) the practical condition of the great controversy between Christianity and the various rival or antagonistic forms of thought, two considerations have forced themselves on my mind, which I have endeavoured to embody in the following pages.

The first is that, while it is necessary to deal with special attacks or difficulties, our great strength lies in the exhibition in all its fulness

been sufficiently applied in Natural Theology, it is perhaps because the tremendous issues of the inquiry after God make the mind impatient of anything but immediate intuition, in any direction in which it may chance first to move. Such impatience although theoretically indefensible, is yet sufficiently powerful in practice to need constant warning that it demands the impossible.

The present series of Lectures attempts simply a sketch of the cumulative force of the various lines of Natural Theology. I trust hereafter to dwell on the relation of Revelation to Natural Theology as being "Supernatural not Preternatural;" and to attempt a similar sketch of the cumulative force of the positive Evidences of Christianity as such.

Believing that the principles which I have endeavoured to set forth are true—while I am deeply sensible of the defects of their treatment and of the responsibility attaching to all witness for God—I trust that, by His blessing, they may suggest thoughts, not wholly unfruitful for the purpose for which these Lectures were instituted.

A. B.

KING'S COLLEGE, LONDON,

*August, 1877.*



## LECTURE I.

### THE UNIVERSAL BELIEF IN GOD.

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- I.—THE CLAIM FOR THEOLOGY OF THE CHARACTER OF SCIENCE,  
NECESSARY FOR THE ULTIMATE INQUIRIES OF HUMAN  
THOUGHT.
  - II.—THE VARIOUS BRANCHES OF THE ARGUMENT.
  - III.—THE UNIVERSAL BELIEF IN GOD, AS EXEMPLIFIED IN THE  
RELIGIONS OF THE WORLD.
    - (a) THE PROGRESS THROUGH POLYTHEISM AND DUALISM TO  
MONOTHEISM.
    - (b) THE SELF-CONDEMNATION OF BUDDHIST NITELISM.
  - IV.—THE UNIVERSAL BELIEF IN GOD EXEMPLIFIED IN LAN-  
GUAGE, AS AT ONCE INSTINCTIVE AND PERMANENT.
  - V.—THE METHOD OF THE GROWTH OF THIS BELIEF IN GOD,  
SIMILAR TO THE GROWTH OF ALL LAWS OF THOUGHT,  
INTELLECTUAL AND MORAL.
  - VI.—THE TRUE SENSE OF THE PHRASE NATURAL RELIGION.
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"At the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of  
three witnesses, shall the matter be established."—DEUT.  
xix. 15.

In all Science there are two kinds of work,  
corresponding to the capacities of two different  
kinds of workers. There is, on the one hand,

the work devoted absolutely and exhaustively to one especial branch of science ; with a view, first to a complete understanding of its theory, both in principle and in detail, and a complete practical mastery of all its powers ; and next, if it may be, to some original research, which shall carry the banner of truth one stage onward in the path of conquest. There is, on the other hand, the work of combination and comparison of the various lines of science, so far as they have been already worked out, pausing thoughtfully to consider how they bear upon each other, either for mutual correction or mutual illustration, and what light they throw on that great problem of Being, which, whatever be the complexity of its parts, is in essence one. These two kinds of work, though practically all but inseparable, are yet perfectly distinct. The history of all science proves, perhaps that there are epochs of alternate predominance of each—epochs (as they have been called) of expansion and of verification—certainly that there are individuals capable of doing good work in one, yet incapable of active service, possibly even of appreciative judgment, in the other. Few, perhaps, are the minds, the leaders of each generation, in which the two powers are harmoniously combined. In that combination they reflect some-

thing of the Divine Mind, which first made all all things, each in its place and order, and then beheld all that He had made, and contemplating it as a whole, pronounced it to be "very good."

I. Now it is certainly as a part of true science, that a Boyle Lecturer is bound to regard theology. The founder of these lectures was, as we know, one of the original members in 1663 of the Royal Society of Literature and Science. He foresaw and rejoiced in the future advance of the science, both of nature and of man, in many directions. He knew, perhaps, the inherent tendency in each branch of scientific thought to usurp regions beyond its rightful empire—"to bear no brother," still more no superior, "near its throne." He desired that the old science of Theology—necessarily, if existent at all, the queen of sciences—should maintain its own proper ground, amidst all the growing claims, and the changeful aspects, of other forms of thought. Well he knew, as his own life shows,<sup>1</sup> at once by the knowledge of its

<sup>1</sup> In his will, referring to the Royal Society, he "wishes them a happy success in their laudable attempts to discover the true nature of the works of God," and prays "that they and all other searchers into physical truth may cordially refer their attainments to the glory of the great Author of Nature and to the comfort of mankind."—See