

**THE WAYS OF GOD; OR,
THOUGHTS ON THE DIFFICULTIES
OF BELIEF, IN CONNEXION WITH
PROVIDENCE AND REDEMPTION**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649731701

The Ways of God; Or, Thoughts on the Difficulties of Belief, in Connexion with Providence and Redemption by Thomas Rawson Birks

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
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IN CONNECTION WITH

PROVIDENCE AND REDEMPTION.

BY

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SEELEY, JACKSON, AND HALLIDAY, FLEET STREET,
LONDON. MDCCCLXIII.

100. v. 2.

P R E F A C E.

THE present work is the continuation of the same line of thought which was opened, and partly developed, in the "Difficulties of Belief," published nearly eight years ago. Its object, like that of the former Essay, is "to remove some of those difficulties which have often haunted thoughtful and inquiring minds, when they reflect on the deeper truths and more solemn aspects of religion, both natural and revealed." A hope was then expressed that the views unfolded "might be to some weary spirits like a streak of morning light upon the distant mountains, when the gloom of night is passing away."

This hope, I desire to record with thankfulness, has been fulfilled. Testimonies have reached me, alike from personal friends, very dear and intimate, and some of them since removed by death, and from previous strangers, that the thoughts in that Essay have removed

dark clouds which had before rested on their spirit, and obscured their vision of the Divine goodness. Besides these effects upon Christians at home, it has been my further privilege to hear, both from the north and the south of India, of missionaries who have found the same thoughts a help and strength in their conflict with the dark and subtle fatalism, by which Mahomedans and Buddhists alike are fenced, as with a Satanic buckler, from the power of the Gospel of Christ.

It is my hope and prayer that the present volume may be attended, even more largely than its predecessor, with tokens of the Divine blessing, and minister to the comfort and instruction of many perplexed and doubting wayfarers in the pilgrimage of this mortal life. May the Great Head of the Church, all whose works are truth, and His ways judgment, vouchsafe to accept the humble offering, and make it minister to the glory of His excellent Name, and to the ripening and perfecting of the faith of his true servants.

KERSHALL RECTORY,

October 20, 1863.

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THE
WAYS OF GOD.

CHAPTER I.

THE LONG CONTINUANCE OF MORAL EVIL.

ONE main source of perplexity to every humble and thoughtful inquirer into the course of Divine Providence, is the long continued prevalence of moral evil. This great fact has tasked the reason of philosophers and the wisdom of divines in every age, and has weighed down and saddened the heart of pious and holy men. The perplexity thus occasioned has been summed up long ago in the homely lines of Prudentius :—

*“Si non vult Deus esse malum, cur non vetat, inquit.
Non refert, auctor fuerit, factorve malorum.
Anne opera in vitium sceleris pulcherrima verti
Cum posset prohibere, sinat? Quod si velit omnes
Innocuos agere Omnipotens, ne sancta voluntas
Degeneret, facto nec se manus inquinat ullo.
Condedit ergo malum Dominus, quod spectat ab alto
Et patitur, fierique probat, tanquam ipse creavit.
Ipse creavit enim, quod, si discludere possit
Non abolet, longoque sinit grassariæ usu.”**

* “If God does not wish evil to exist, why, he says, does He not hinder it? It matters not whether He be the author or the doer of

How to reconcile this continuance of evil with the power and goodness of God, is a problem which has given birth to various theories in heathen philosophy, and to their counterparts in different schools of Christian theology. If we say that evil cannot be banished at once, and dispelled for ever, by a simple act of Divine volition, this seems, to ordinary apprehensions, to limit the power of the Almighty. On the other hand, if we suppose Him to leave many of His creatures for long ages, and even for ever, under the power of sin and all its fearful consequences, when all of them might be recovered any moment to perfect purity and happiness, this appears to be a denial of His perfect goodness.

The task of throwing light on this great moral problem is rendered more difficult by the errors and rashness of good and pious men. They have gained a deep conviction, from their faith in the word of God, of the mingled power, wisdom, and goodness of the Creator. But this faith is mixed up with much remaining ignorance and darkness, which soon betrays itself, when they pass beyond the first and simplest lessons of practical religion. They then condemn speculation in others, and dogmatize themselves, on speculative grounds, among the depths of Providence.

evil things. Should He permit most excellent works to be turned into wickedness when He might prohibit it? But if the Almighty were to please that all should live innocent, the holy will would not degenerate, nor the hand pollute itself with any evil deed. Therefore God has made evil, which He beholds from on high, and suffers, and approves that it should take place, as if He himself had created it. For He has created that which, if He is able to banish it, He does not abolish, and permits to run riot by long continuance."