

**LUCRETIUS AND
THE
ATOMIC THEORY**

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Lucretius and the Atomic Theory by John Veitch

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JOHN VEITCH

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BY

JOHN VEITCH, LL.D.,

PROFESSOR OF LOGIC AND RHETORIC IN THE UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW.

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THIS ADDRESS

Is Dedicated

*TO THE MEMBERS OF THE PHILOSOPHICAL SOCIETY
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH,*

TO WHOM IT WAS READ,

AND AT WHOSE REQUEST IT IS PUBLISHED,

*BY ONE WHO HAS MANY PLEASANT MEMORIES OF
STUDENT DAYS PASSED IN THAT
UNIVERSITY.*

Latin
E. Kelley
3-19-38
35988

LUCRETIIUS
AND
THE ATOMIC THEORY.

THERE is a somewhat popular impression that speculation, or abstract thought, and imagination are incompatible. Perhaps they are rarely found together in remarkable exercise in the same individual; and this, while no proof of their incompatibility, is quite sufficient to satisfy a popular logic. I should be very sorry, indeed, to think that they are incompatible; for I do not know any greater help to the speculative power, or better corrective of vagueness in speculation, than imagination. The more you can individualise thought, the more clear it becomes, the less verbal, the more real; and all individualising, all embodiment of the abstract, is an imaginative effort, and often a very hard one. It is one certainly very unlike

that of the pseudo-artistic faculty, or rather tact, which is so common in these days, and which, animated by no true feeling either for nature or human character, looks at impressions as capable simply of being worked up into artistic shape, or made into images sensuously complete. This is the abandonment of thought, and the apotheosis of organism.

- Of course the artistic faculty may be truly and nobly inspired by impressions from without, and it may love that outward world around us with a great and pure love. Its exercise is then genuine, beneficial, and elevating. Although between this side of imagination and the speculative effort there is no essential connection, the free love and the free picturing of the former are very helpful to the freshening of the latter, and in keeping us alive to the fact that there is a great impersonal side of things, over and above our individually constructed world of notions.

So far from there being any incompatibility between speculation, the search for the most general or universal element in our notions of things, and the play of imagination alongside of this, vivid as a real presence,—there is, in every normal thinker, a true harmony. They are, in fact, lines of a corresponding

rhythm; and we fail of the nearest and highest fruits of the speculative effort, if the glimpse we get into the ultimate meaning of things—of Origin, Space and Time, Power, Moral Law and Liberty—do not quicken the emotions through the imagination, and purify us by awe and reverence. The very indefiniteness of the intellectual vision, even after long speculation, is an element in its imaginative power; it is a suggestion of the limitless: and the emotions arising from it find their parallel in the grandest of those inspired by the outward world,—by glens whose depths are revealed to us by streaks of light that pierce their unfathomable shadows, or by long lines of gleaming waters that carry the eye upwards athwart the mountain height, and yet are finally folded in the mists that fill their urns.

This impression of an incompatibility between the intellectual and the imaginative is shown to be groundless by many names in the course of abstract speculation. Plato, Pascal, and others at once occur to us; but there is no more complete type in history of the fusion of the two qualities than the subject of this address—I mean Lucretius.

The poet is supposed to have been born B.C. 99,