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Theism in the Light of Present Science and Philosophy

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The Committee of the University of New York chose a professor of the Aberdeen Free Church College as the first lecturer under the Charles F. Deems trust, which provides that the lectures shall treat of some one of the most important questions of Science and Philosophy, with special reference to its relation to the revealed truths of the Holy Scriptures and to the fundamental principles of Theistic Philosophy. The present volume is the result of Professor Iverach's acceptance of the post as thus defined. From a survey of some of the great branches of natural science the lecturer is able, in his opening chapter, to say on good grounds that the power at work in the world is an intelligent power, and that natural science, while it has given wonderful glimpses of knowledge to the men of the past century, leaves vast and numerous questions to be answered by philosophy and religion. The inorganic world is next regarded as a preparation for life, and the physical characteristics of life, its genesis, growth, and meaning and its rational implications are examined. When the lecturer proceeds to discuss the making of man, and the relation of the individual to the rest of the human family, he asks whether a rational religion is possible, and in the course of his reply makes some acute criticisms on the writings of Mr. Kidd and Mr. Balfour. Professor Iverach thinks that 'the method common to both is even worse than the results to which they come,' and he regards the habit of setting part against part, and of straining the relation in which two or more elements in a larger unity stand to one another, until nothing but a relation of contradiction is left, as fatal to all fruitful thinking (p. 194). A chapter on the character and meaning of personality leads on to a consideration of the nature, history, and demands of religion. 'The personality in ourselves is so far given as to enable us to see what a perfect personality is' (p. 226), and 'we seek a God who can speak to us and to whom we can speak, a God who is something for Himself, as well as something for us, who can be the home of our life, and meet every aspiration, desire, and longing of the whole man' (p. 259). When this position has been reached the lecturer can fearlessly look out from a firm shore upon the troubled sea of philosophy in its agnostic aspect, and finally concludes with a chapter on idealistic philosophy. 'In the surrender of a man to Christ, and in the giving of Himself by Christ to man, we find a fact of religious experience in which an ideal is reached, and the man who surrenders himself to Christ finds himself in Christ' (p. 325). The reader of these lectures will be encouraged to take a hopeful view of the future. Philosophically, Professor Iverach says, we have to retrace our steps somewhat, and try to make the metaphysic of Kant agree with his ethic. Theologically we have to make our abstract doctrines 'a fuller representation of the reality of the concrete personal, religious life of the individual, and of individuals constituted into a society of redeemed men. . . . Every increase of knowledge is available for the service of theology, and theology is giving itself to the mighty task of using it. For theology is in the central position, and has the widest command of the requisite resources; it can alone adequately deal with the postulates and the fullness of the religious life; and if unity is to be attained, it must be attained through theology' (pp. 325-6).

—*The Church Quarterly Review*, Volume 51 [1901]

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