Lectures on the origin and growth of the conception of God as illustrated by anthropology and history

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THE HIBBERT LECTURES,
1891.
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LECTURES
ON, THE
ORIGIN AND GROWTH
OF THE
CONCEPTION OF GOD
AS ILLUSTRATED BY
ANTHROPOLOGY AND HISTORY.

BY
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1892.
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TO

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRUSSELS,

FOUNDED BY PRIVATE INITIATIVE

ON THE PRINCIPLE OF FREE INQUIRY.
Preface.

Many attempts have been made to trace the development of the conception of God; and, apart from the work of the theologians, the anthropologists and historians have often been led by their respective methods to widely different solutions of the problem. It has appeared to me, however, that these methods do not exclude each other; nay, that each finds in the other its necessary supplement.

I may be reproached for associating such different methods together, and I have already been told that as soon as we apply what is known as the comparative method to the investigation of the origins of Religion, or endeavour to trace its pre-historic development, or even to elucidate the evolution of Religion in general, by reference to the fortunes of the several creeds, we have already left the domain of history, and entered upon that of pure philosophy.

I should myself prefer to give a wider signification to the word history, and make it include all attempts to recover the past of mankind; but if we are to restrict its application to facts of the "historic age" of civilized communities, then history must assuredly be supplemented by other studies which can throw light upon a
remoter horizon. It is true that these studies cannot give us certainty—nor, indeed, can history itself always do that;—but at least they can give us information concerning the origin and early stages of human culture, the details of which may lend each other mutual support, and may find confirmation in historical facts. And what, after all, do the names we give our methods signify, provided they bring us nearer to the truth?

While my premises wake the suspicion of those who shrink from applying the ordinary canons of investigation to religious phenomena, my conclusions, in their turn, may prove unacceptable to those who see in the spirit of free inquiry the standing foe and the destined destroyer of the religious sentiment itself. Yet I cannot tax myself with want of logic or with partiality, if my attempt to deduce the laws of religious evolution from the admitted facts has brought me to the conclusion that the scientific treatment of Religion does not affect the religious sentiment in the revolutionary manner feared by some and hoped for by others. Rather does the study of comparative theology seem to reveal a growing tendency towards the admission of the principle laid down by Herbert Spencer, as a bond of union between religion and science,—that "the power manifested throughout the universe distinguished as material, is the same power which in ourselves wells up under the form of consciousness," both modes of force being regarded as phenomenal manifestations of one absolute Reality by which they are immediately produced.

I trust that in this treatment of my subject I have remained faithful to the spirit which inspired the founder
of the Hibbert Trust and the promoters of the Hibbert Lectures.

I have only to add that I regard this work as a continuation of my previous studies on "The Contemporary Evolution of Religious Thought in England, America, and India."\(^1\) Having described the most advanced forms of Religion amongst the enlightened minds of our age, I felt a special interest in investigating the gradual development of these forms and the relation in which they stand to the lowest manifestations of religious culture. Enormous as the distance appears, it does not prove impossible to trace the road that leads from the one extreme to the other; and here again we find an illustration of that adage which is now coming to dominate every branch of knowledge, *Natura non facit saltus*.

I ought to express my gratitude to the Hibbert Trustees for having offered me this unique opportunity of developing my views before an English public whose hospitable welcome I shall always remember. But what adequate terms can I find, when M. Ernest Renan himself described a similar invitation as "one of the rewards of his life"?

I have also to offer my special thanks to Mr. Wicksteed for the patience and accuracy with which he has executed the translation of these Lectures.

**Goblet d'Alviella.**

*Court St. Etienne, Dec. 1891.*

ERRATUM.

P. 5, line 10, for "Boechoven" read "Bachofen."

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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.

The references to Tylor's "Primitive Culture" have, through inadvertence, been made to the first edition (1871), except in a few cases.

The following table will enable possessors of any edition to find the passages referred to.

On p. 56 the passage referred to is ii. 285 of the editions of 1873 and 1891.

| "83" | "" | ii. 360 |
| "112" | "" | ii. 178 sq. |
| "114" | "" | ii. 177 sq. |
| "115" | "" | ii. 174 |
| "117" | "" | ii. 216 |
| "140" | "" | ii. 349 |
| "189" | "" | ii. 69 of the edition of 1871. |
| "190" | "" | ii. 73 |