Human progress and the inward light

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HUMAN PROGRESS
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INWARD LIGHT

BY

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Preface

The Swarthmore Lectureship was established by the Woodbrooke Extension Committee, at a meeting held December 9th, 1907: the minute of the Committee providing for "an annual lecture on some subject relating to the Message and Work of the Society of Friends." The name "Swarthmore" was chosen in memory of the home of Margaret Fox, which was always open to the earnest seeker after Truth, and from which loving words of sympathy and substantial material help were sent to fellow-workers.

The Lectureship has a two-fold purpose: first, to interpret further to the members of the Society of Friends their Message and Mission; and secondly, to bring before the public the spirit, the aims and the fundamental principles, of the Friends.

The previous lectures of the series have been as follows:—

Preface


The above lectures have been delivered on the evening preceding the assembly of the Friends’ Yearly Meeting in each year.
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Human Progress and the Inward Light

I.

"Let us make man in our image."

It may well be doubted whether, since the first days of the preaching of Christianity, there has ever been a more complete change in the mental outlook of educated men than that which has been wrought in the life-time of the men of my generation by the announcement and the general acceptance of the doctrine of Evolution.

In my boyhood the general belief of the unscientific many—and also, I think we may safely say, of the scientific few—was that the genera and species of animal and vegetable life had existed since the beginning of the world, very much in the same condition in which we see them around us at the present day, separate, distinct, invariable. Now, though there may be many
vast spaces still unmapped in the history of organic life, I think we may safely assert that the overwhelming majority of educated men believe that history to have been one of constant development and change; believe that there is, if we had faculties to trace it, a true genealogical connection between the lowest and the highest forms of life. In other words, we believe in Creation by Evolution; and, far from feeling our reverence for the Creator in any wise lessened, it is rather immeasurably increased by our conviction that He has been for ever working through the ages elaborating His great and wonderful designs. If one may venture so to alter the utterance of the poet:

Yet I doubt not through the ages one increasing purpose runs,
And the ways of God are widened with the process of the suns.

So thoroughly has this view of the manner of creation now taken possession of our souls, that I think we should most of us feel it a sore trial and strain upon our faith if some new revelation of the rocks assured us that, in reality, "all things continue as they were since the foundation of the world"; that at some not very distant date, say six or seven thousand years ago, the world as we