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The Method of the Divine Government

This 1850 edition of *The Method of The Divine Government* is the Scottish philosopher and clergyman James McCosh's influential account of how God's providence, which in his opinion is an unquestionable fact, governs the world in both a physical (external) and in a moral (internal) sense. The latter is particularly connected to the many layers that make up man's conscience. This second edition, which consists of four parts ('books') and an appendix, differs from the original version as McCosh pays far more attention to first principles than to fundamental ones. He seeks to pinpoint God's character and probes the depths of man's conscience (First Book) and in the following he delves into the physical aspects of God's government, paying particular attention to Comte's Positivism. McCosh devotes Book Three to a detailed analysis of the human mind and moral nature and finally in the Fourth Book he reconciles God and man.

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THE METHOD

THE DIVINE GOVERNMENT,

PHYSICAL AND MORAL.

BY

REV. JAMES M'COSSH, A.M.

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PREFACE TO FIRST EDITION.

WE live in an age in which the reflecting portion of mankind are much addicted to the contemplation of the works of nature. It is the object of the author, in this Treatise, to “interrogate nature,” with the view of inducing her to utter her voice in answer to some of the most important questions which the inquiring spirit of man can put.

He thinks it needful to state, thus early, that he proceeds on the inductive method in his inquiry, and not, on the one hand, after the plan of those British Rationalists, who set out with a preconceived system, which they dignify with the name of Rational, and then accommodate all that they see to it; nor, on the other hand, of those German Intuitionists, who boast that they can construct the existing universe by *à priori* speculation.

To guard against misapprehension, he wishes it to be understood, that he treats in this book, of the Method of the Divine Government in the world, rather than in the Church; of the ordinary providence of God, rather than his extraordinary dealings towards his redeemed people.

The reader of severe taste will be inclined to regard the Introductory Book as too loose and discursive; and all the apology that the author has to offer is, that he was afraid of driving back the general reader, by leading him into the minutiae, before he had contemplated nature under its general aspect.

The general reader, on the other hand, may be disposed to complain, that the style of discussion followed in some of the Sections and Notes of the Second and Third Books, is of too

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abstract a character. He has to justify himself to such, by stating, that he did not feel at liberty, in such an age as this, to avoid grappling with any of the difficulties which fell in his way, and that he has attempted, by the principles of a deeper philosophy, to confute the wrong conclusions drawn by a superficial philosophy. He has so constructed his work, that the general reader may pass over the more abstract portions (as, for instance, some of the Illustrative Notes) without losing the train of argument.

It is due to the memory of the late Dr. Chalmers to acknowledge, that had not the author enjoyed the inestimable privilege of sitting for four or five sessions at the feet of this illustrious man, in the University of Edinburgh, he would, in all probability, never have had his thoughts directed in the train which he has followed, and have been without the spirit which he has sought to cultivate, as he would certainly have been without not a few of the principles which he has carried along with him in his investigations. It is with no feeling of presumption that he thinks it proper to add, that did he not imagine that he had some truth to communicate, not contained in the works of Dr. Chalmers, he would not have obtruded himself on the public notice, as it could never have occurred to him, that he was able to state the ideas of his eloquent preceptor so clearly or impressively as he has done himself, in his writings now so extensively circulated.

He has to acknowledge his obligations to Principal Cunningham, to Professor Buchanan, and to the Rev. Dr. Hanna, for the kind encouragement which they gave him to proceed with this work, when submitted to them for their counsel; as also to the two last mentioned gentlemen and the Rev. John Mackenzie, Ratho, for their judicious assistance in overlooking the sheets as they passed through the press.

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PREFACE TO SECOND EDITION.

IN this edition the author has corrected the style throughout, simplified the arrangement in some places, added a few more illustrative facts in the Physical portion, and given a fuller exposition of his views of First Principles. But the most important alteration consists in transferring to an Appendix the discussions on Fundamental Principles, so far as they are not necessary to the consecutiveness of the argument in the text. In this way, he trusts that he has made the body of the work clearer and more interesting to the general reader, while the student with a taste for abstract philosophy will find the metaphysical disquisitions in a more connected form in the Appendix.

In issuing the former edition, the author was not a little afraid that a work on such a subject by an unknown author might fail to secure any attention. The deepest feeling which he cherishes, on being called so speedily to issue a second edition, is that of gratitude to the God of Providence, who has been pleased to open up a favourable reception for his volume, and to the Public Press, which, with scarcely an exception, has given it a welcome beyond its merits.

BRECHIN, *July* 1850.