

**THE ORIGIN OF  
EVIL. AND  
OTHER SERMONS**

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The Origin of Evil. And Other Sermons by A. W. Momerie

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**A. W. MOMERIE**

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## THE ORIGIN OF EVIL

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OTHER SERMONS

By  
[Richard Williams L. S. S. S. S.]

"TRUTH IS THE PROPERTY OF GOD; THE PURSUIT OF  
TRUTH IS WHAT BELONGS TO MAN."

—Ven. Müller.

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS

EDINBURGH AND LONDON

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## CONTENTS.

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	PAGE
THE ORIGIN OF EVIL, . . . . .	1
THE MYSTERY OF SUFFERING—	
I. . . . .	13
II. . . . .	26
III. . . . .	40
IV. . . . .	53
PRAYER, . . . . .	65
“WHAT IS TRUTH?” . . . . .	75
MANLINESS—	
I. . . . .	87
II. . . . .	97
III. . . . .	107
THE GREATNESS OF MAN, . . . . .	121

FAITH, . . . . .	131
CHRIST'S PLAN OF SALVATION, . . . . .	141
WORKS, . . . . .	152
HABIT, . . . . .	161
THE HARVEST OF CHARACTER, . . . . .	170
THE SUPERNATURALNESS OF NATURE, . . . . .	181
THE NATURALNESS OF THE SUPERNATURAL, . . . . .	192
"THE ARGUMENT FROM DESIGN," . . . . .	202
THE VISION OF GOD, . . . . .	212
PUNISHMENT, . . . . .	222
THE FATHERHOOD OF GOD, . . . . .	232



## *The Origin of Evil.*

“The Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.”—GENESIS II. 16, 17.

**M**Y purpose in the present sermon is to show that God is not to be held responsible for the existence of evil.

I shall not be able to discuss the Manichean or optimist views—both of which seem to me more or less erroneous—but I shall assume the ordinary opinions (which, probably, you all hold) that evil is a reality, that it is hateful to God, and that He is more powerful than any other being in the universe. How is it, then, let us ask, that evil exists?

Most theologians tell us that it must have been permitted by God for some wise purpose; but that it is impossible to imagine what that

purpose can have been, and that therefore its existence calls for the exercise of an unlimited amount of faith. In other words, they talk as if reason, apart from faith, would suggest that God ought to have prevented evil, and that had He done so we should have been much more fortunately situated than we are. Now reason, I take it, teaches no such thing. It shows us (on the contrary) that the prevention of evil would have made our world not better than it is, but worse. So far, at any rate, as our present subject is concerned, reason and faith are at one in maintaining that our world is the best of all possible worlds.

I must ask you, first, to notice that God works under certain restrictions, conditions, or limitations. We say He can do all things; but by this we should only mean all things that are consistent with His own nature. He cannot lie; He cannot be unkind. Some theologians I know (notably Paley and Occam) have maintained that lying and unkindness are only wrong because God has forbidden them. Occam said that if God had commanded us to hate Him, it would have been our duty to do so. But the most sober theologians have agreed in maintaining that God could not make wrong right or right wrong. Dr

Ralph Cudworth has shown very clearly, in his book on *Eternal and Immutable Morality*, that the distinction between right and wrong is a distinction which is *not made* but *accepted* by God. This distinction God could not alter even if He would. He is good and God because He would not alter it even if He could. Well, then, this amounts to saying that God, like ourselves, is under moral obligations. There are other conditions, also, under which God works. He cannot, *e. g.*, make two and two into five. He can create a fifth thing; but that is different. He cannot, once more, make the same thing both to be and not to be at the same time. He can annihilate it; but then it has ceased to be. He can recreate it; but then it no longer is not. Now I want to show you that, in regard to the existence of evil, God was under a similar limitation, because He could not have prevented it without at the same time destroying the possibility of goodness. If I can succeed in proving this, I shall have proved that God could not have prevented evil at all, consistently with His own wisdom and perfection.

There are only three conceivable ways in which evil could have been prevented. God might have refrained from creating beings cap-