

Rev. George Matheson, D.D., LL.D., F.R.S.E.

By Rev. James Lindsay, D.D.

(Read November 5, 1906.)

It is to me a real, though melancholy, satisfaction to utter what Æschylus calls a few "posthumous words in praise of a divinely good man"—ἐπιτύμβιον αἶνον ἐπ' ἀνδρὶ θείῳ.\*

Dr George Matheson became a Fellow of this Society in 1890. One of the most valuable features of the Royal Society of Edinburgh is its recognition of literary distinction as well as of Scientific eminence, even though nothing has yet been done to differentiate and develop its literary resources after the manner of the Royal Society of Canada. To this literary side of the Society Dr Matheson belonged. Yet he was not without a keen interest in scientific theories such as those of Tyndall, Spencer, Darwin, and Comte. Indeed, such books as *Can the Old Faith live with the New?* and *The Psalmist and the Scientist* were, at the time of publication, highly useful attempts at some reconciliation of science with religion.

Born at Glasgow in 1842, he became M.A., with philosophical honours, at the University there in 1862, and B.D. in 1866. He held ministerial charges at Innellan and St Bernard's, Edinburgh, in both cases with distinguished success. In 1879 the degree of D.D. was conferred upon him by Edinburgh University, that of Aberdeen bestowing upon him LL.D. at a later period. In 1881 he held the Baird Lectureship; and in 1899 he was appointed to the Gifford Lectureship in Aberdeen, which, however, he declined.

Blind from his youth, Dr Matheson's intellectual interest and Miltonic courage won a supreme conquest. His literary industry was astonishing, his mental energy great and unceasing. He thought rapidly: truth came to him in intuitive flashes. Of volumes he published almost a score, and, in addition, many magazine articles. His work was varied in character and contents—historical, doctrinal, apologetical, exegetical, devotional, and

\* *Agamemnon*, 1547.

poetic. So much poetic charm and vital individuality went to the making of his best prose work, that his fame was carried to the ends of the English-speaking world. His genius was *religious*, but it was religious *genius* — the genius of insight and unique performance.

Passing from his work to his personality, one must emphatically say that the man was more than his work, his character greater than his performance. The chief feature of that character was an essential nobility of mind, in which respect Dr Matheson stood far above the level of most distinguished men. He was withal genial and companionable to a high degree. Suddenly, but peacefully, he was, on the 28th of August, withdrawn into the mystic, eternal shadows. Brave in spirit and strenuous in endeavour to the last, his life remains an example and an inspiration.