

ANTI-THEISTIC THEORIES.



LECTURE I.

ATHEISM.

I.

IN the course of lectures which I delivered last year I endeavoured to show that theism was true; that there was an overwhelming weight of evidence in favour of the belief that the heavens and the earth and all that they contain owe their existence and continuance in existence to the wisdom and will of a supreme, self-existent, omnipotent, omniscient, righteous, and benevolent Being, who is distinct from, and independent of, what He has created. In the course which I have undertaken to deliver this year, I wish to subject to examination the theories which are opposed to theism, and I hope to be able to prove that they are essentially irrational and erroneous. When

engaged in the attempt to establish that theism has a broad and solid foundation both in fact and reason, I contented myself with simply warding off the attacks of those who deny that it has such a foundation. But obviously more than this may and should be done. It is our right and our duty to inquire also if those who reject and assail theism are themselves standing on firm ground, and if the systems which have been raised in hostility to theism are as impregnable as we have found itself to be. It is this right which I intend to exercise; it is this duty which I shall endeavour to perform.

In dealing with theories which have nothing in common except that they are antagonistic to theism, it is necessary to have a general term to designate them. Anti-theism appears to be the appropriate word. It is, of course, much more comprehensive in meaning than the term atheism. It applies to all systems which are opposed to theism. It includes, therefore, atheism. No system is so opposed to theism as atheism; it is the extreme form of opposition to it. But short of atheism there are anti-theistic theories. Polytheism is not atheism, for it does not deny that there is a Deity; but it is anti-theistic, since it denies that there is only one. Pantheism is not atheism, for it admits that there is a God; but it is anti-theism, for it denies that God is a Being distinct from creation and possessed of such attri-

butes as wisdom, and holiness, and love. Every theory which refuses to ascribe to God an attribute which is essential to a worthy conception of His character is anti-theistic. Only those theories which refuse to acknowledge that there is evidence even for the existence of a God are atheistic.¹

An examination of anti-theistic theories ought evidently to begin with atheism,—the complete negation of theism. The term atheism, although much less general in signification than anti-theism, includes a multitude of systems. Atheism has a great variety of forms. Its advocates are by no means agreed among themselves. On the contrary, if their comparatively small number be taken into account, they are far more divided into sects than theists. They are at one only in their utter rejection of theism. I am not aware of any positive distinctive principle which atheists hold in common. As soon as they attempt to state a doctrine which may fill the place of theism, dissension breaks out among them at all points. It is an obvious consequence of the fact that atheism is thus indefinite, divided, and varied, that its chief phases must be discussed separately. It cannot be treated fairly by being treated as what it is not,—a single, self-consistent system. It is really a series or aggregation of discordant and conflicting systems. At the same time, some

¹ See Appendix I.

general remarks regarding it may not be without use.

Atheism is the rejection of belief in God. It teaches either that there is no God, or that it is impossible for man to know that there is a God, or that there is no sufficient reason for believing that there is a God. In other words, it either absolutely denies that there is a Divine Being; or it denies that the human mind is capable of discovering whether or not there is a Divine Being; or it simply maintains that no valid proof of the existence of a Divine Being has been produced. Atheism in the form of a denial of the existence of a God has been called dogmatic atheism; atheism in the form of doubt of man's ability to ascertain whether there is a God or not has been called sceptical atheism; atheism in the form of mere rejection of the evidence which has been presented for the existence of a God may be called critical atheism. There is no individual system of atheism, however, which is exclusively dogmatic, exclusively sceptical, or exclusively critical. These terms express accurately only ideal distinctions which have never been exactly realised. Sceptical atheism and critical atheism are inseparable. A purely dogmatic atheism would be utterly incredible. Sceptical atheism and critical atheism have always been much more prevalent than dogmatic atheism. In

every form—even in its most modest form—atheism pronounces all belief in God a delusion, and all religion a fable. What is called practical atheism is not a kind of thought or opinion, but a mode of life. It may coexist with a belief in the being of a God. It is the living as if there were no God, whether we believe that there is a God or not.

The existence of atheism has often been doubted. It has been held to be absolutely impossible for a man entirely to throw off belief in God. The thought of a universe without a creator, without a presiding mind and sustaining will, without a judge of right and wrong, has seemed to many to be so incredible that they have refused to admit that it could be sincerely entertained by the human mind. And it may be conceded that there is an element of truth underlying this view. The whole nature of man presupposes and demands God, and is an enigma and self-contradiction if there be no God. The reason of man can only rest in the Divine Reason as the first cause; his affections tend to a supreme good which can only be found in God; his conscience contains a moral law which implies a moral lawgiver. He can only be conscious of himself as dependent, finite, and imperfect, and consequently as distinguished from that which is absolute, infinite, and perfect. In this sense all theists will probably hold that the soul

bears within it a latent and implicit testimony against atheism and on behalf of theism; and the opinion is one which cannot be refuted otherwise than by what would amount to a refutation of theism itself. But although man's whole nature cries for God, and can only find its true life in God, there can be little doubt that he may so contradict himself, so violate the most essential principles of his own nature, as to persuade himself that there is no reason in the universe higher than his own, no good which is not earthly and perishable, no righteous judge, no infinite and eternal God. The number of those who have gone this length may not have been so large as it has sometimes been represented. Many have certainly been called atheists unjustly and calumniously. Some may possibly have professed themselves to be atheists who really professed a religious belief which they overlooked. But that there have been atheists—that there are atheists—cannot reasonably be denied. When men teach the most manifest and explicit atheism—when they avow themselves to be atheists—when they glory in the name—we must take them at their word. To say that they do not conscientiously believe what they teach is an assertion which no one has a right to make unless he can conclusively prove it, and for which there will be found in many cases no proof whatever. The strangest

and most monstrous beliefs can be conscientiously held by the weak and erring children of men. The absurdities of superstition make easily credible the sincerity of atheism. If one man can honestly believe that there are a thousand fantastic gods, another may honestly believe that there is no god. Without hesitation or reservation, therefore, I grant that Feuerbach fully meant what he said when he wrote, "There is no God; it is clear as the sun and as evident as the day that there is no God, and still more that there can be none;" Gustave Flourens when he penned these words, "Our enemy is God. Hatred of God is the beginning of wisdom. If mankind would make true progress, it must be on the basis of atheism;" and Mr Bradlaugh when he told his audience, "My friend Mr Holyoake says, with regard to the words infidelity and atheism, that he objects to them because of the opprobrium which has gathered round them. The people who fight for old nationalities remember the words of opprobrium that have been heaped on their country and their cause, but only to fight to redeem cause and country from that opprobrium. They do not admit the opprobrium to be deserved, but they fight to show that the whole is a lie. And I maintain the opprobrium cast upon the word atheism is a lie. I believe atheists as a body to be men deserving respect, and I do not care what kind of character religious

men may put round the word atheist. I would fight until men respect it." I know no reason for suspecting the sincerity of these men or of these statements, and therefore I do not suspect it.

There are open and avowed atheists whom we are bound to believe to be what they profess themselves to be. There are also some who disclaim atheism, yet who plainly teach it under other names. A large amount of the speculation which is called pantheistic might with equal propriety be called atheistic. Many materialists have repelled the charge of atheism, because they held matter to be endowed with eternal unchanging properties and powers ; many positivists and secularists have fancied that they could not be properly called atheists because they did not undertake to prove that there is no God, but only to show that there is no reason for supposing that there is one ; but, of course, belief in the eternity of matter and motion is not belief in the existence of God, and atheism is not only the belief that God's existence can be disproved, but also the belief that it cannot be proved. We have no desire to attach to any man a name which he dislikes, but a regard to truth forbids us to concede that atheism only exists where it is avowed.

Atheists have seldom undertaken to do more than to refute the reasons adduced in favour of belief in God. They have rarely pretended to

prove that there is no God ; they have maintained that the existence of God cannot be established, but not that His non-existence can be established ; they have tried to justify their unbelief, but they have not sought to lay a foundation for disbelief. And the reason is obvious. It is proverbially difficult to prove a negative, and there can be no negative so difficult to prove as that there is no God. Were a man to be landed on an unknown island, the print of a foot, a shell, a feather, a scratch on the bark of a tree, the perforation or indentation or upheaval of a little earth, would be sufficient to show him that some living creature had been there ; but he would require to traverse the whole island, and examine every nook and corner, every object and every inch of space in it, before he was entitled to affirm that no living creature had been there. The larger the territory to be traversed and examined, the more difficult would it necessarily be to show that it had not a single animal inhabitant. So to show that there is a God may be very easy, but to prove that there is certainly none must be extremely difficult, if not impossible. There may be as many witnesses to God's existence as there are creatures in the whole compass of heaven and earth, but before we can be sure that nothing testifies to His existence, we must know all things. The territory which has in this case to be surveyed and investigated is the

universe in all its length and breadth; it is eternal time and boundless space, with all the events which have occurred in time, and all the objects which occupy space. Before a man can be warranted to affirm that nowhere throughout all this territory is there any trace of God's existence, he must have seen it all and comprehended it all, which would require omnipresence and omniscience, or, in other words, would imply that he is himself God.

Foster and Chalmers have so admirably presented this argument in celebrated passages of their writings that it is unnecessary to dwell upon it further.¹ It has only been attempted to be refuted by an author who has fallen into singular mistakes as to its nature. Mr Holyoake fancies that it turns upon an arbitrary use of the words "denial" and "knowledge." There is not the slightest foundation for such a notion. The word denial, and even all the sentences which contain it, might be deleted without the argument losing a particle of its force. The word knowledge is employed in its ordinary and most general signification. The knowledge of the eyesight is no more demanded of the atheist for his negation than it is alleged by the theist for his affirmation. The whole argument turns simply on the manifest and indubitable difference between proving an affirma-

¹ See Appendix II.

tive and proving a negative. From that difference it follows necessarily that the inference that there is a God may be warranted by a very limited knowledge of nature, but that the inference that there is no God can only be warranted by a complete knowledge of nature. If the author mentioned had not thoroughly misconceived the character of the argument he would never have imagined that it could be thus refuted by inversion. "The wonder," he says, "turns on the great process by which a man could grow to the immense intelligence which can *know* that there *is* a God. What powers, what lights are requisite for *this* attainment! This intelligence involves the very attributes of Divinity, which must therefore be possessed by the theist while they are pretended to be sought. For unless this man is omnipresent, unless he is at this moment in every place in the universe, he cannot know but there may be, in some place, manifestations of nature independent of Deity, by which even *he* would be overpowered. If he does not know absolutely every agent in the universe, the one that he does not know may be the eternal source of all life. If he is not himself the chief agent in the universe, and does not know that God is so—that which is so may be the eternal and independent element which animates nature. If the theist is not in absolute possession of all the propositions which constitute universal truth, the one which he wants may be,

that nature is the primordial and sole existence. If he cannot with certainty assign the cause of all that he perceives to exist, that cause may be nature. If he does not know everything that has been done in the immeasurable ages that are past, some things may have been done by nature. Thus, unless the theist knows all things—that is, precludes all other independent existence by being the infinite existence himself—he does not know that the nature whose supremacy he rejects, does not self-subsist and act on its own eternal essence.” Foster’s argument is here travestied, but certainly not answered. Where is the wonder that men should know that there is a God? Such knowledge must indeed be elevated and glorious, but it may well be within the reach of a feeble and limited intelligence. It implies a certain likeness to God, but none of the distinctive attributes of God. A single square foot of earth may contain numerous proofs that there is a God, but only the entire universe can furnish evidence that there is none. He who does not know absolutely every agent in the universe cannot be sure that the one of which he is ignorant may not be the eternal source of all life and thought, while the most familiar manifestations of life and thought may reasonably convince him that their eternal source cannot be dead and thoughtless matter. If the theist undertook to prove the non-existence of nature,—that there

are no natural causes and no effects produced by them,—he would venture on the same kind of task as that of the atheist who attempts to establish that there is no God, and his audacity might then be rebuked and his want of wisdom evinced by the same kind of reasoning. In that case refutation by inversion would be legitimate and conclusive; but it is clearly inapplicable in any other case. Before it can be employed some one must be found to maintain that there is no nature, which is the only proposition corresponding to there is no God. But no theist maintains the non-existence of nature. What he maintains is that nature is an effect whose cause is God.

If the argument of Foster and Chalmers be well founded, atheism ought certainly not to be a self-confident system. It can never be sure that there is no God, and can never have a right to deny that there is a God. It must simply affirm that theism has not been proved true, and must abandon the hope of ever proving it to be false. It must rest in a state of suspense and hesitation from which there is no probability of deliverance, unless by theism being proved true. It must never express itself more strongly than by such phrases as "there is no knowing whether there be a God or not,"—"there is no saying,"—"it doth not yet appear." Is this not a very strange and dreary condition for the human mind to be condemned

to abide in? If such be the natural condition of the human mind, must not the constitution both of the mind and of the universe in relation to the mind be about the worst conceivable? But is it not much more likely that atheists have deceived themselves, than that either the mind or the universe has been so badly made as atheism implies? Is it not much more likely that atheism is false, than that the human mind has been made not for truth, but for doubt?

To deny that God can be known is scarcely less presumptuous than to deny that God is. For, it will be observed, it assumes that we are capable of describing the limits both of human attainment and of Divine power. It assumes that we are not only able to say here is a proposition which the human mind can never ascertain to be true, but also here is a proposition which cannot be revealed to be true even by an infinite mind, supposing such a mind to exist. It assumes, that is to say, in the first place, a kind of knowledge of the human mind such as no man has got. We can discover the conditions and laws to which reasoning and research must be conformed if the human mind would attain truth; but we cannot ascertain the external limits of intellectual progress. To lay down that this or that proposition, which involves in itself no contradiction, can never be known, never be proved, is sheer dogmatism. The

mind has no right to assign fixed limits to its own advancement in knowledge; it has no warrant even for doubting that it may advance for ever, its horizon constantly receding, its range of vision growing always wider and more distinct. When the atheist declares, therefore, that God cannot be known, he dogmatizes presumptuously as to the limits of human power; he arrogates to himself a superhuman knowledge of the possible attainments of the human mind. But worse than this, while denying that an infinite mind can ever be known, he assumes that he himself knows what an infinite mind would be capable of. He tells us in one breath that we can never know even the existence of an almighty Being, and in the next that he himself knows what such a Being could not do; that he knows that God could not make His existence known to us. Under the apparent humility of the declaration God cannot be known, there lurks the affirmation that a finite mind can trace the limits of infinite power. Therefore, I say, to deny that God can be known is scarcely less presumptuous than to deny that God is. It implies in him who makes the denial the possession of a Divine attribute—the possession of infinite knowledge.

The atheist, then, who would not virtually declare himself to be a god, must not venture to deny either that God is or that God can be known,

but must be content merely to deny the sufficiency of the evidence for God's existence. He must be content to be a mere critic; he is bound to confess that atheism is really no theory or explanation of the universe; that no positive or independent or scientific proof of it need be looked for; and that facts sufficient to overthrow it may be brought to light any instant. Atheists are, however, seldom thus diffident, and we cannot wonder that they are not. There are very few minds which could acquiesce in a hopeless and inexplicable hesitancy and suspense. Atheism would make no converts unless it showed more confidence than it is rationally entitled to do.

Not unfrequently it displays great confidence. Thus Von Holbach, in the 'System of Nature,' tells his readers that the existence of God is "not a problem, but simply an impossibility." But for this strong statement he had only the weak reason that "we cannot know God truly unless we are God." We have just seen that to know there is no God, or that God cannot be known, implies such knowledge as only a God can have, but that only a very little knowledge may suffice reasonably to convince us that there is a God. Feuerbach, as I have already mentioned, declares it "clear as the sun and as evident as the day, not only that there is no God, but that there can be none." We seek in vain, however, for the demon-

stration of this startling assertion. In its place there is presented to us an unreasoned and superficial hypothesis as to the origin, nature, and history of religion. Religion, in Feuerbach's opinion, is self-delusion in the form of self-deification. It is his own nature which man projects out of himself, personifies, and worships. He idealises himself, believes the ideal real, and adores the imaginary being whom he has created. Religion is thus a phase of insanity under which the whole human race laboured for thousands of years, until the one wise man appeared who discovered that his fellow-men had been idiotically bowing and cringing before their own shadow. It is this discovery which makes it "clear as the sun and evident as the day, not only that there is no God, but that there can be none." Mainländer claims, in his painfully gloomy work, to have for the first time founded atheism on a scientific basis. But to accomplish his task he finds it necessary to represent Christianity as, like Buddhism, a system of atheism. Maintaining the atheism of these two religions, he infers that atheism is the natural goal of human development. The mass of assertions which he accumulates around this ludicrous argument he assures us is a scientific demonstration. Czolbe, Dühring, and some other German atheists, might be referred to as equally audacious in profession and feeble in performance. A zealous English

advocate of atheism, Mr Bradlaugh, has frequently said, "If God is defined to mean an existence other than the existence of which I am a mode, then I deny God, and affirm that it is impossible God can be. That is, I affirm one existence, and deny that there can be more than one." But the terms "existence" and "mode" are here employed in so peculiar and equivocal a manner that the declaration may have either a theistic, pantheistic, or atheistic meaning. It has no proper or definite meaning.

Atheism is essentially irrational when not merely critical. And even when merely critical it is not very rational. This statement is based on the entire argumentation in the previous course of lectures. The chief aim of that course was to exhibit the evidence for the existence of God, and the proof of theism is necessarily the refutation of atheism. Further, a secondary aim, kept in view throughout, was directly to repel the objections which atheism has brought against the validity and sufficiency of the fundamental theistic proofs; to show that their weight is scarcely appreciable when fairly poised against the reasons in the opposite scale, and that, almost without exception, the subtlest and most plausible of them indicate only defects or difficulties in the metaphysics of religious speculation, and should have no influence whatever on the practical decision, at which the

mind ought to arrive, as to whether there is a God or not. If I succeeded in doing so I must, of course, have refuted the atheism which rests on these objections,—the atheism which is purely critical. But whether I succeeded or not, it will be better now to offer some general considerations on atheism in its intellectual, emotional, and moral aspects, than to return on what has been already done, or at least, on what has been already tried to be done.¹

II.

How does atheism satisfy the intellect? There is around us a world of order and beauty; a world in which elements are wonderfully compounded and qualities wonderfully associated—in which there is at once an admirable regularity and an admirable diversity—in which all things work together. What explanation does atheism give of this world? There is an atheism which does not pretend to give any explanation; which tells us even that there is no explanation to be given, and that it is foolish to ask for any. This kind of atheism, to be consistent, ought to forbid all investigation whatever; ought to lay an arrest on thought and research at the very outset of their course; ought to explain nothing; ought not to recognise that there is any such thing as law and

¹ See Appendix III.

order. This kind of atheism is a direct and complete violation of the rational principle in man. The human intellect is by its very constitution compelled to seek first causes for events, and final causes for order and adaptation; and it has no right to stop short, as the atheist would have it, when it cannot advance farther without rising to the apprehension of a Creative Reason. If it will not go as far as its principles legitimately lead, it has no right to start at all; it must deny itself entirely; it must wholly renounce its own nature. In other words, a brute may, but a man cannot, be a consistent atheist of this class. Pure empiricism is so far beneath humanity as to be beyond its reach, and can support nothing either human or rational.

There is an atheism which teaches that the world is but the last effect of an eternal succession of causes and effects, and that there has been no first cause. The mind, however, rejects as absolutely absurd the notion of an eternal series of worlds which depends on no originating principle. It demands a first cause, a true and self-existent first cause. A series may be indefinitely extensible; it cannot be infinitely extended. Where there is a last term there must have been a first term. If each of a series of effects be dependent, all the effects of that series must be dependent, and on a cause which precedes them. If the last link of a

chain be supported by the link above it, that by the third link, the third by the fourth, and so on, the entire chain cannot hang upon nothing. An endless adjournment of causes is a process which is meaningless and useless, and in which reason can never acquiesce. For reason to abandon belief in a self-existent eternal cause for belief in an eternal series, every part of which is the effect of an antecedent cause, while the whole is an effect without a cause, is a suicidal, a self-destructive act. Besides, the supposition of the eternity of the series of worlds obviously cannot free us from the necessity of believing in an eternally operative intelligence to account for the order, the mechanical and organic adjustments, the finite minds, &c., to be found in these worlds. The conviction which a man feels when looking at St Paul's that it must have had an architect of wonderful genius, is not disturbed or lessened by his knowledge that it was built two centuries ago. And in like manner, the inference that the world must have had an intelligent cause ought to be as legitimate and strong were it eternal, or the last of an eternal series, as if it were the only world and had been created four thousand years or four days ago. The inference from order and adjustment to intelligence is unaffected by the consideration of time ; it is valid for all time, and for eternity as well as for time. The eternity of the series of worlds supposed can

be no evidence that it is uncaused by intelligence ; it can only entitle us to affirm that if the series have a cause, the cause must be eternal, since the effect is eternal. The hypothesis of an eternal series of worlds is thus an utterly vain and unreasonable device ; a most futile attempt to evade the obligation of belief in God.

There is an atheism which teaches us that matter and its laws account for all the harmonies and utilities of nature, for all the faculties and aspirations of the human soul, and for the progress of history. But this form of atheism also, popular although it be, fails to establish any of its pretensions. It neither accounts for matter and its laws nor shows that they do not require to be accounted for. It assumes the self-existence of matter and its laws, although theism founding on science undertakes to show that they must have had an origin. The basis of this atheism is therefore a manifest *petitio principii*. And, even with its initial assumption, it does not explain the harmonies of the physical universe, nor the properties of vegetable and animal life, nor the mind of man, nor his moral principles and religious convictions. It puts what is lowest and most imperfect first, what is highest and most perfect last. It regards this contradiction of all rational thinking as a grand achievement.

There is an atheism, incredible as it may sound,

which teaches that the universe, with all its objects and laws, is the creation of the finite human mind. What we call outward things are, according to this hypothesis, but mental states. All that is is *ego*; is the self-acting of itself and limiting itself, and so producing the *non-ego* or universe. Such is the doctrine on which a kind of atheism has been founded, which has sometimes received the name of autotheism, seeing that it would make man his own God and the creator of the heavens and earth. The celebrated Fichte was, at a certain stage of his philosophical career, accused of atheism in this form. He was supposed to teach a purely subjective idealism which would have been irreconcilable with any worthier religious theory; to maintain that the moral order of the universe which he identified with God was, like the universe itself, the creation of the personal *ego*. But he indignantly repelled the charge and denied that he had ever confounded the personal with the absolute *ego*, or taught a purely subjective idealism, or overlooked that development is inexplicable without belief in an immutable Being; and although the view generally given of his philosophy is inconsistent with these exculpatory statements, I believe that they must be accepted. It is admitted on all hands that, later in life, this noble-minded man was neither subjective idealist nor autotheist. Schopenhauer and others do not hesitate to tell

us that within the mind, some of them expressly say within the brain, of man, the immensities of time and space and all their contents lie enclosed ; in Schopenhauer's own language, "did not human brains, objects scarcely as big as a large fruit, sprout up incessantly, like mushrooms, the world would sink into nothingness." This strange hypothesis finds a strange counterpart in the speculations of two of the latest of German atheists as to the magnitude of the brain. Schopenhauer thought it no bigger than it seemed to be, and yet supposed that it contained the universe. Czolbe and Ueberweg fancy that its apparent size is but an extremely diminished picture of its real size ; that, in fact, it is colossal, stretching beyond the fixed stars, and covering the whole field of vision. Certainly either the universe would require to be much smaller than it is, or the mind of man much greater than it is, before the notion that the latter is the source or cause of the former can be for a moment entertained. The atheism which makes the finite mind the creator and sustainer of the universe is its own best refutation.

Atheism, then, yields no satisfaction to the reason, but is in all its forms a violation of the conditions of rational belief. Does it satisfy better the demands of the heart ? The atheist is without God in the world, and therefore has only the world. Will the world without God satisfy a

human heart? No man will venture to maintain that material things and outward advantages—meat and drink and raiment, wealth, honours, influence—can satisfy it. The heart of man—the atheist himself, if he be a person of any refinement and elevation of character, will grant at once—cannot be content with merely material and earthly good; it must have something which responds to higher faculties than the sensuous and the selfish. It would be to insult the atheist to suppose him even to doubt this. What he will say is that although without God there remains to him truth, beauty, and virtue, and that these things will yield to him such satisfaction as his nature admits of, and one of which he needs not be ashamed. Let us see.

The truth in which the atheist must seek the satisfaction of his heart can only be, of course, mere truth,—truth apprehended not as expressive of the thought and affection and will of God, but as expressive of the properties and relations of material things and human beings. Suppose, however, that a man knew not only all that science has at present to tell, but all that it will ever be able to tell about the world of matter and the mind of man and human history, would it be reasonable to expect this fully to satisfy him? I think not. Were all that is to be known about the material universe actually known, the man who

knew it would simply have within himself the true reflection of what was existing without him; on his spirit which thinks there would simply be a correct picture of that which does not think. But the soul which would not be satisfied with the very world itself, could it have it, will surely not be satisfied with that pale reflection of it which constitutes science. The soul which is itself so superior every way to the world cannot have for its highest end merely to serve as a mirror to it, and to show forth not the likeness and glory of God, but of what is without life, without reason, and without love. And were all that is to be known about the mind of man actually known, the soul which knew it would only have a knowledge of itself. But could any person except a fool rest in complacent contemplation of himself? True self-knowledge is very much the reverse of pleasant or satisfying. Shame and terror are often its most natural effects. Science, culture, truth, when separated from their one eternal source in the Infinite Life, the Infinite Love, show us nothing higher than our own poor selves—nothing that we can look up to—no object of trust, of adoration, of affection. How, then, can they satisfy hearts the true life of which consists in the exercise of faith and hope, reverence and love? Severed from what will worthily develop the higher emotional principles of human nature,

they may lead the soul into a land as waste and famishing as what only concerns the body, or even into a still more howling and hungry wilderness. The spiritual affections if denied appropriate sustenance, if presented only with purely intellectual truth, will either die of inanition to the sore impoverishment of the mind, or they will live on to torment it with a pain more grievous than that of unappeased animal appetite. For true it is, as an eloquent preacher has said, in words which I cannot exactly recall, but which are nearly as follows: "There is on earth a greater misfortune than to crave for bread and not to have it, and a sadness more complete than that of bereavement, sickness, poverty, even pushed to their extremest limits; there is the bitterness of a soul which has studied, and searched, and speculated, which has pursued with eager and anxious heart, truth in many directions, and yet, because it sought it away from the light and life which are in God, has only found in all directions doubt and nothingness."

What we cannot find in truth, however, may we not find in the enjoyment of the beautiful in nature and art? In his last work—'The Old and the New Faith'—this is what Strauss points to as a substitute for religion. The admiration of fair scenery, of painting, music, and poetry, may, it is hoped, fill the void in the heart caused by the

absence of faith in God. The picture-gallery, the concert-room, the theatre, may help us to dispense with the Church and its services. Now, certainly, it is greatly to be desired that the love of the beautiful in nature and art were more widely diffused among all classes of the community. He who contributes to its cultivation and extension confers on his fellow-men no mean boon, no slight service. But so far from being able to supply the place of the love of God, the love of the beautiful itself withers and corrupts, becomes weak or becomes foul, severed from that love. Art of a high and healthy order has ever drawn its inspiration largely from religion. The grandest buildings, the most beautiful paintings, the noblest music, the greatest poems, are religious. The arts have hitherto spread and advanced in the service of religion, or at least in connection with it. They have never flourished except in a spiritual atmosphere which is the breath of religious faith. Atheism — unbelief — has, alike in ancient and in modern times, and in all lands, been found fatal to art. Before it is entitled to point us to art as a substitute for religion, it must be able to show us where there is an art which can elevate and improve the mind that has not been directly or indirectly engendered by religion. It must show us that it can create and sustain a noble art. Atheistical art, so far as the world has yet known

it, has been art of a diseased and degrading kind. It need scarcely be added that art, whether good or bad, can never be more for the majority of men than a source of comparatively rare, fragmentary, and temporary enjoyment. It is for the leisure hour and for the lighter moods and occasions of life; not for times either of heavy toil or heavy trial. It were well that hard-working men valued art more generally and highly than they do, and so enjoyed such power as it possesses,—a real and precious power of its kind,—to refresh those who are weary, and to soothe those who are troubled; but it were ill that they abandoned for it religion. Art is a beautiful flower, but religion is a strong staff. Art is a sweet perfume, but religion is necessary sustenance. Without aid from art the spirit will lack many a charm, but without aid from religion it will lack life itself.

It is said that nature lies open to the inspection and contemplation of all, and presents the same beauties and sublimities to the atheist as to the theist? It must be answered that the atheist and the theist, so far as they are thoughtful and self-consistent men, cannot but view nature very differently and feel very differently towards it. To the atheist nature may be beautiful and sublime, but it must be, above all, terrible. Nature stands to him in place of Deity, but is the mere embodiment of force, the god of the iron foot, without ear

for prayer, or heart for sympathy, or arm for help. It is immense, it is sublime, it sparkles with beauties, but it is senseless, aimless, pitiless. It is an interminable succession of causes and effects, with no reason or love as either their beginning or end ; it is an unlimited ocean of restlessness and change, the waves of which heave and moan, under the influence of necessity, in darkness for evermore ; it is an enormous mechanism, driving and grinding on of itself from age to age, but towards no goal and for no good. Says Strauss himself, "In the enormous machine of the universe, amid the incessant whirl and hiss of its jagged iron wheels—amid the deafening crash of its ponderous stamps and hammers—in the midst of this terrific commotion, man, a helpless and defenceless creature, finds himself placed—not secure for a moment, that on some unguarded motion, a wheel may not seize and rend him, or a hammer crush him to powder. This sense of abandonment is at first very awful." And we may add, the longer it is realised it should grow more and more awful, ever deeper, denser, and darker, until the atheist feels that for him to talk of heartily enjoying nature were a cruel mockery of his own helplessness. We can only be rationally free to enjoy nature when we have confidence that one hand of an almighty Father is working the mechanism of the universe and another guiding His children in the midst of

it, so that neither wheel nor hammer shall injure one hair of their heads.

When truth and beauty fail, will the atheist find his virtue suffice? Will morality, when exclusive of service to God, when separated from the thought of God, satisfy and sustain the human heart? Does atheism meet the claims and supply the wants of conscience? This is to ask, in other words, if a man will be as strong for duty without as with belief in an almighty and perfect moral Judge and Governor? And the question is surely one which answers itself. The believer in God has every motive to virtue which the unbeliever has, and he has his belief in addition, which is the mightiest motive of all. It is often hard enough even for the believing man to conquer his passions, to bear the burden which Providence imposes, and to be valiant for the right against wrong; but how much harder must it be for the unbeliever? His evil desires are not checked by the feeling that Infinite Justice beholds them and condemns, nor are his strivings after God sustained by the consciousness that the Almighty and All-merciful approves and favours them. When he sees falsehood widely triumphant over truth, vice over virtue, he has no right to expect that it will ever be otherwise. If the highest wisdom and goodness in existence are man's own, the mystery is not that the world is so bad as it is, but that it is

not indescribably worse. When sickness and loss come to the atheist they may be patiently and bravely borne, but they cannot be welcomed as they may by one who feels that they are sent to him by supreme wisdom and love to purify and discipline his character, and to work out in him and for him an exceeding weight of glory. It is not for him to say—

“Oh ! there is never sorrow of heart
That shall lack a timely end,
If but to God we turn, and ask
Of Him to be our friend !”

And what can he say in its stead? When death enters his home and strikes down some dear one, he hears no Father's voice, sees no Father's hand, feels no consolation of a comforting Spirit, but sits, in a darkness which is unrelieved by a single ray of light, mourning over the work of the senseless energies of nature. When death lays hold of himself, and he knows that there is no escape, he can only yield himself up to a dread uncertainty, or to the cold comfort of annihilation, the hope of being dissolved into the elements of which he was at first compounded—earth to earth, ashes to ashes; mind and heart as well as body to ashes—thoughts, affections, virtue to ashes; all, dust to dust. Is there much encouragement to virtue there?

The atheist may reply, I take from life no moral support which it really possesses; I do not remove

God from the world, but find the world without God, and I cannot rest my confidence on what seems to me to be a fiction. He may urge, also, that truth must be accepted, whether it appear to us to be all that is morally desirable or not. But one who answers thus cannot have understood the tenor of what we have advanced. If the atheist be right, of course it is not he who takes from life any hope, or strength, or charm which truly belongs to it. That truth must be accepted, whether sweet or bitter, consoling or desolating, is what no one doubts. But the question is, Can truth and goodness be at variance with one another? Can the belief of falsehood be more favourable to the moral perfection of mankind than the belief of truth? The most intrepid lover of truth may well hesitate before he answers in the affirmative. It is probably, indeed, impossible to show on atheistical principles why reason and virtue should not be in antagonism—why falsehood, if believed, should not be more conducive in many cases to virtue and happiness than truth; but the conclusion is none the less one which must seem perfectly monstrous to any mind which is not grievously perverted either intellectually or morally. If it were accepted, mental life could have no unity or harmony. For who could decide between the competing and conflicting claims of truth and virtue, of reason and morality? Neither

the truth unfavourable to morality nor the morality capable of being injured by truth would deserve, or could be expected to receive, the homage due to truth and morality when allied and accordant.

Atheism has not unfrequently been advocated on political grounds. Religion has been presented as the support of tyranny and the cause of strife. Its abolition, it has been argued, would emancipate the mind and secure peace. This view will always be found to rest on the confusion of religion with superstition. But superstition is as distinct from religion as *from* atheism. Superstition and atheism are both contraries to religion, and, as was long ago remarked, are closely akin. They are related to religion as the alternating feverish heat and shivering cold of bodily disease are related to the equable temperature of health. The one gives rise to the other; the one easily passes into the other. Each is to a large extent chargeable, not only with the evils which it directly produces, but with those which it originates by way of reaction. Both flow from ignorance and erroneous views of Divine things. "The atheist," as Plutarch tells us, "thinks that there is no God; the superstitious man would fain think so, but believes against his will, for he fears to do otherwise. Superstition generates atheism, and afterwards furnishes it with an apology, which, although neither true nor lovely, yet lacks not a specious pretence." On the

other hand, atheism drives men into superstition. Wherever it spreads, religious credulity and servility spread along with it, or spring up rapidly after it. A reasonable religion is the only effective barrier against either atheism or superstition.

It has been disputed whether atheism or superstition be politically the more injurious. Perhaps the problem is too vague to be resolved. But certainly the spread of atheism in a land may well be regarded with the most serious alarm. In the measure that a people ceases to believe in God and an eternal world, it must become debased, disorganised, and incapable of achieving noble deeds. History confirms this on many a page. "All epochs," wrote Goethe, "in which faith, under whatever form, has prevailed, have been brilliant, heart-elevating, and fruitful, both to contemporaries and posterity. All epochs, on the contrary, in which unbelief, under whatever form, has maintained a sad supremacy, even if for the moment they glitter with a false splendour, vanish from the memory of posterity, because none care to torment themselves with the knowledge of that which has been barren."

"The idea of an intelligent First Cause," says Mazzini, "once destroyed,—the existence of a moral law, supreme over men, and constituting an obligation, a duty imposed upon all men, is destroyed with it; so also all possibility of a law

of progress, or intelligent design, regulating the life of humanity. Both progress and morality then become mere transitory *facts*, having no deeper source than the tendency or impulse of individual organisation; no other sanction than the arbitrary will or varying interest of individuals, or—force. In fact, the only imaginable sources of life are—God, chance, or the blind, insuperable force of things; and if we deny the first to accept either of the others, in the name of whom, or of what, can we assume any right to educate? In the name of whom, or of what, can we condemn the man who abandons the pursuit of the general good through egotism? In the name of whom, or of what, can you protest against injustice, or assert your duty and right of contending against it? Whence can you deduce the existence of an aim common to all men, and therefore giving you an authority to declare to them that they are bound by duty to fraternal association in pursuit of that common aim?"

The prevalence of atheism in any land must bring with it national decay and disaster. Its triumph in our land would bring with it, I believe, hopeless national ruin. If the workmen of the large towns of this country were, as a body, to adopt the principles which have at certain periods swayed the minds of the workmen of Paris and

Lyons,—were as a body to adopt atheism and its concomitant beliefs,—utter anarchy would be inevitable. In such a case, owing to the very prosperity we have reached, and the consequent extreme concentration of population within a narrow circuit, the problem of government would be a hundredfold more difficult in England than it has been in France and Germany even in their darkest days. But no man who examines the signs of the times can fail to see much tending to show that atheism may possibly come to have its day of fatal supremacy. Polytheism there is nothing to fear from. Pantheism, except in forms in which it is hardly distinguishable from atheism, there is comparatively little to fear from. It is improbable that this country will be afflicted to any great extent with a fever of idealistic pantheism resembling that which Germany has passed through. What chiefly threatens us is atheism in the forms of agnosticism, positivism, secularism, materialism, &c.; and it does so directly and seriously. The most influential authorities in science and philosophy, and a host of the most popular representatives of literature, are strenuously propagating it. Through the periodical press it exerts a formidable power. It has in our large centres of population missionaries who, I fear, are better qualified for their work than many of those whom our Churches send forth to advocate to the same classes

the cause of Christianity. There is a great deal in current modes of thought and feeling, and in the whole constitution and character of contemporary society, to favour its progress. Atheism is a foe opposition to which, and to what tends to produce it, ought to draw together into earnest co-operation all who believe in God and love their country.¹

¹ See Appendix IV.