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ON THE
CAUSES OF ATHEISM.

A LECTURE

DELIVERED AT BRISTOL, ON FEBRUARY 7, 1871.

BY

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ὦ γῆς ὄχημα κἀπὶ γῆς ἔχων ἔδοαν,
ὅστις ποτ' εἶ σὺν, δυστόπαστος εἰδέναι,
Ζεῦ, εἴτ' ἀνάγκη φύσεως εἴτε νοῦς βροτῶν,
προσηυξάμην σε. πάντα γὰρ, δι' ἀψόφου
βαίνων κελεύθου, κατὰ δίκην τὰ θνήτ' ἄγεις.

Euripides (Troades, 884.)

CAUSES OF ATHEISM.

EVERY great phenomenon has a history. Theism has a history, as well as Atheism, and each is instructive. But Atheism, being a more limited fact, may be treated in a narrower space; and I venture to hope, its stimulating causes may be so expounded as to aid towards some result. This hope induced me to invite your attention this evening.

I called Atheism a limited fact; yet in an important sense of the word, and, some may think, the truest sense, it is painfully common even among professing Christians. Such is the use of the word by Paul to the Ephesians, who during their immoral Pagan state, he says, were "*without God* in the world," or, (closer to the Greek,) "Atheists in the world." As I understand him, to believe in God is not merely to *assent* with the intellect that there is something in the Universe superior to man, but to *revere* that superior existence. He who reveres nothing, who worships nothing above him, but lives unconscious of allegiance to God, is in the estimate of Paul an Atheist. Wherever sensuality or avarice is widely spread, in whatever form men live to self, there Atheism widely prevails. But if this phraseology be thought too ambiguous, I will modify it, as follows: He who gives intellectual assent to the being of a God, yet neither reveres God nor regards man, is *worse* than an Atheist. In contrast I will add, He who finds intellectual difficulties in the doctrine of a God, and knows not what to think of it, yet is intel-

lectually modest and morally reverential, has the heart of a Theist, and may eminently deserve esteem.

The short of it is, that Religion is in the heart, not in the dry mind. Intellectual Belief may be barren, but Moral Faith is the parent of true virtue, and a natural companion of those noblest virtues, Reverence and Love. Yet in this short statement we do not embrace the whole. A man may be *admired* for the power or accuracy of his intellect, but he is not therefore *esteemed* or *loved*: on the other hand, whatever the deficiencies of his intellect, he deserves esteem, if he be good. If we love God Himself, it is for His *goodness*, not for His power or high intelligence; and the same law of love must be applied to man. Thus there are two sorts of Theists, and two sorts of Atheists. One who is intellectually a Theist may either be reverential or destitute of reverence; and so may an Atheist. But Reverence is the vital element of moral and spiritual character. In an intellectual Theist this element may be dead or stagnant, and in an intellectual Atheist it may be active. If we fully possess ourselves with this thought, we shall come to the discussion of the Theistic argument with a chastened, calmer, and wiser heart.

It is an old saying, among Pagan Greeks as well as Hebrews, that "Reverence is Wisdom." The wisest of the Greeks, in the midst of their highest cultivation, were so conscious of the extreme imperfection of their knowledge, that in their addresses to God Atheistic doubt seems to blend with Theistic faith. There is a celebrated passage in Euripides (Troades, 884,) which I beg to read to you, translated as I am best able:

"Oh Thou on whom Earth rideth, who on Earth
Art firmly seated! Jove! whoe'er Thou art,—
Hard to be guess'd, whether Necessity
In Nature fix'd, or Mind in mortal men;—
Thee I adore: for Thou, by noiseless track
Passing, dost justly all things mortal guide."

An anecdote is told among the Greeks, that Hiero, military ruler of Syracuse, requested the accomplished poet Simonides, to tell him what was his belief concerning God. The poet asked leave to defer his reply until the next day: but when the next day came, he asked yet another day to shape his thoughts more accurately; and after that, a third day. At length he confessed, that the longer he meditated, the harder he found it to define a reply. You see the elements of this doubt in the passage which I have read from Euripides. The poet begins by identifying God with the *ether* in which this earth floats or rides; but adds, that He hath also firm seat on earth: that is, He is not merely external to earth, but also resident and persistent upon it. The poet then, to the current formula, "Whosoever Thou art,"—expressive of wide uncertainty,—annexes: "Hard to be guessed, whether Thou art Necessity of Nature, or the Mind that pervades mortal men." Thus he embraces, though doubtfully, in the being of God, first all the natural forces of the Universe, such as we now call Gravitation, Cohesion, Electricity, and such like; next, the Mind by which we think and know and feel. If he had stopped in saying that God was *only* the Necessity of Nature, a blind force, it would have been Atheism. When he adds the opinion that God is the Universal Mind, some will say, Is not this Pantheism? No: for he regards God as worthy not only of wonder, but also of adoration; and closes by emphatically ascribing to Him the Righteous Government of the human world.

Observe the gradation of doubt and of faith. Concerning the physical constitution of God (if the phrase may be allowed) the Greek poet was essentially doubtful; but concerning His moral government of the world, concerning the rightfulness of adoring Him, and virtually concerning His goodness, he expresses *no* doubt. And is not this exactly the

reasonable posture for a finite man, in reverentially essaying to define some thoughts concerning the infinite God? Consider of what kind is our knowledge of our fellow-men. How little do we know of their essential being; how late and limping is physical science in the history of man: yet our moral knowledge is old and certain. Love, goodness, virtue, esteem, trust, gratitude,—are very ancient experiences and confident beliefs: but, what is a Soul *physically*; when it begins to exist, and whether it ceases to exist; are comparatively very obscure speculations. In all human knowledge, properties are learned first; the essence of things is learned later, if ever. In other words, and perhaps more accurately, we *apprehend* things on the side in which we are in contact with them, but we *comprehend* very few things at all.

Consider again the instructive analogy furnished by the knowledge which the brutes may have of man. No one will imagine that an affectionate dog has any other knowledge of his master than a limited *apprehension*. What guess could Sir Isaac Newton's favourite spaniel have of the quality, powers, and range of his master's mind? yet he had no doubt whatever that his master loved him, and deserved to be loved, though to *comprehend* his master's nature was utterly beyond his capacity. Just so, the cardinal point of practical Theism lies in an energetic development of the moral relation of God to Man and Man to God; and its wisdom lies in great diffidence concerning the essential nature and powers of God, whom with one voice we avow to be incomprehensible. Since we know not His limits, nor have reason to assign any, we call Him unlimited, boundless, infinite, as to Space and as to Time: and again, since we have no reason to imagine that he changes with Time, we call him Unchangeable as well as Eternal. There is nothing of obscure or doubtful metaphysics here. But as of all things outward and visible our know-

ledge is very limited and our ignorance is infinite, how much more must this be true of our acquaintance with an invisible eternal Spirit?

After these preliminary remarks, let me proceed to the historical origin of Atheism. In all the most intelligent races of men, and those with whose early mind we have best acquaintance, Atheism does not grow up with men's first speculations concerning the Universe, but develops itself at a later stage; and, as I believe, prevalently as a reaction from errors into which Theists fall.

When it is our duty to sit in judgment on the sin of others, our mental vision is purified, and we become fairer, wiser judges, if we begin by inward confession of our own sin. Just so, if Theists are to judge truly of Atheists, or aid to convert them, Theists need to examine their own errors which have led Atheists astray, or have driven them into reaction. I hope it is not needful to remind you that Christians are Theists. To the errors of Christian Theists I must refer presently; but I first speak of the earlier developments of Atheism, as known to us.

Ancient Greece is the world in historical miniature, politically and religiously. We have their infant religion laid before us in the poems of Homer. Though the Greeks were so very intelligent a race, yet their early conceptions of Deity scarcely admitted moral elements. Theism was with them a physical speculation only, and rested unduly on the violent phenomena of nature. In Thunder and Lightning, in Earthquakes and Storms, they saw the agency of their chief gods. Yet they did not overlook more tranquil processes, as vegetation, birth, and the recurrence of Day and Night; also the more eminent powers of the human mind. Inferior deities were assigned to these. The gods were supposed to punish occasionally the greater sins of mortals, but by no means to conform their own conduct to any law of morality. The national

religion, having its source in private and various fancies, was combined and popularized by poets, under whose treatment its wildness was exaggerated into folly, caprice, or brutality. Necessarily, the growing intellect of the nation scorned such a religion. Nevertheless, it does not appear that any conscious and systematic Atheism broke out, until a serious attempt had been made to defend the wretched and baseless mythology by mystical interpretation and other subtle devices. Then the indignation of free thought led, first to universal Doubt, next to positive Atheism. The Doubters held that no truth is attainable on such subjects; the Atheists, that though there may be Superior Spirits, yet they have nothing to do with the creating or maintaining of the universe, and stand in no moral relation whatever to men. The name of Epicurus was best known in Greece as the advocate of the latter doctrine; to us the Epicurean views are most accessible in the poem of his devoted disciple, the Roman Lucretius; and in him we see most distinctly that disgust at the coarse, wild, and mischievous conceptions put forth as Religion was the animating principle of his Atheism.

What happened then, is sure to happen again in like circumstances. If the ostensible teachers of religion hold up for men's homage and reverence a God whose qualities and dealings shock our moral nature, it must not be expected that all who reject such a creed will be able to separate its falsehoods from its truth. Many will reject it in the mass, and become Atheists; but by far the largest number of them will keep their unbelief to themselves. It is notorious that, as among the priests of ancient Rome contemporary with Cicero, so in the priests of Spain, Italy, and France, Atheism has been a common result of corrupt religion. Protestantism does not offend common sense (at least in my opinion) so violently as Romanism; nevertheless, all who heard the scolding

words of Mr Bradlaugh in this room against the creed called orthodox in England, will permit me to insist, that an ingenuous scorn of what he regards as a degrading portraiture of God gives impulse and motive to his Atheism. English Protestants are not guiltless in this matter. They have persecuted the frank and bold men who avow their disbelief, hereby driving more timid men into silence and suppression. Christians have certainly taken no pains to instruct Atheists; but if they had, how could they expect instruction to be well received, while the public law treated Atheists as criminals, and gave them fines and imprisonment for arguments?

But I return to the point. If the men and system typical of a national religion present for reverential homage the portraiture of an unjust, unmerciful, capricious, or impotent God, the unbelief and scorn which justly follows will, through human infirmity, carry not a few into a disbelief of God altogether; in which case the folly of Theists is largely responsible for the Atheism. I do not wish to go into detail, as Mr Bradlaugh did, and point at the special errors which arouse indignation; it suffices to say that there *are* opinions concerning God or the gods, which nothing can prove. It avails not to quote books called sacred, or to alledge miracles, if the doctrine itself be such as the human conscience loathes or the human intellect finds to be contemptible. If sacred books uphold such things, so much the worse for the books. Books cannot have proof of infallibility so strong, as is the disproof of a doctrine which mars and pollutes the divine character. Christians habitually confute other religions by this very topic, and stigmatize as Paganism or Heathenism this very error of holding unjust, or impure, or self-indulgent, pampered gods; and insist that such a religion is necessarily evil to the votary's mind; hence it destroys its own claim of reverence.

Let it also be carefully considered that the great basis of popular knowledge is, moral truth. All social action, all national cohesion, all reverence for law, all sanctity in rule, is founded upon man's moral conscience; much more is all rational or worthy religion. "He who loves not his brother whom he hath seen, how shall he love God, whom he hath not seen?" He to whom the words Justice, Righteousness, Mercy, Holiness, Goodness, have no positive and consistent meaning, can have no reason within him for worship and reverence. Practical Religion must be based on these great moral ideas. A creed which violates them demoralizes men, when it does not drive them into unbelief. If a national religion be totally corrupt, widespread Atheism is nothing but the natural death of a creed which has lost moral vitality. If the Atheism spring from moral indignation, I believe that it can only be a temporary winter of the national soul in preparation for a more fruitful summer. If a very corrupt national creed,—say, like that of Hindooism,—were swept away by Atheism when other agencies had failed, we perhaps ought to regard the Atheism as a beneficial visitation, like a hurricane which destroys pestilence.

I have tried to set forth one cause which I believe must always tend to produce Atheism, namely—if morally offensive features be ascribed to the Most High in a really national creed; but, coupled with this, there too often is met a presumptuous familiarity and dogmatic pretension quite inconsistent with a reasonable estimate of the human intellect. A Roman writer said, sarcastically, "This man fancies he knows accurately what Jupiter said in private to Juno." Well, we see the outrageousness of such mythology. But how less is Milton blameable, who supposed himself competent to expound the discourses held by God the Father with his only begotten Son? Theology has been garrulous and confident, where modesty or

silence alone becomes us. Men who call God incomprehensible seem to forget this fundamental principle precisely when it is most needed. One truth surely is quite open to every intellect,—that the knowledge of man is limited. We see distinctly what is near, and perhaps seem to know it; but what is extreme in remoteness we cannot see at all. In the interval there is generally a region of half light, half shade; what is called *penumbra*; where we see a few strong outlines and all the rest dimly; or, it may be, we think at one moment that we see, and the next moment doubt whether we saw aright. These phenomena of sight have their close correspondences in the mind, which in consequence is sure of some things with the greatest certainty permitted to man, is in blank ignorance of others, and finds between these extremes a region of half-knowledge, with a few certainties pervading it, but in general affording matter for modest or reverential opinion, not for light-minded and off-hand decision, nor for scholastic dogmatism. If Theists transgress modesty in dealing with this region of thought, how can they expect modesty or tenderness from Atheists?

But I proceed to a second deplorable phenomenon, equally baneful, namely—the tangle of Metaphysics in which Theistic advocates have involved their doctrine. Christianity from the beginning had as its boast, “Unto the poor the gospel is preached.” A religion which addresses itself to the human race must be intelligible to simple minds. If men and women, if the great mass of a nation, are intended by God to revere and worship Him, the grounds of believing in God must be on the level of very ordinary intellects. Theism, equally with Christianity, cuts away the ground from under its own feet, if it teaches that difficult questions of Metaphysics must be settled before we can reasonably believe in God. We know familiarly how much the conversion

of heathens to Christianity is hindered when two missionaries teach opposite doctrines, refuting one another. In such case no one can reprove the heathen,—every one must say he is blameless,—if he reply to those who desire to convert him, that one of them must convert the other before it is worth his while to attend to them. So, too, candour demands from us the admission that Atheists say nothing unreasonable, if (being in no other respect presumptuous or irreverent) they avow that the inconsistencies of Theistic advocates wholly discourage them from spending study on so doubtful a subject. Such appears to me to be the position of George Jacob Holyoake. In fact, when Mr Bradlaugh in this room claimed him as an Atheist, I did not think it right to contradict, though to me his Atheism is, at any rate, of a widely different complexion from Mr Bradlaugh's. I feel that George Jacob Holyoake is a very modest man, very reverential, and very anxious to learn from all whom he sees to be sincerely and earnestly striving for truth. I believe he distrusts his own power of judging, where he finds the advocates of Theism defending their doctrine in modes so obscure and subtle, and mutually inconsistent. I must attempt to set before you some of the controverted questions, even at the risk of getting out of my own depth. When I see able men devoting their lives to Metaphysics, and coming to opposite conclusions, I cannot but feel great diffidence in my own power to deal with such subjects, and am always earnestly desirous to keep clear of them. In fact, if anything could make me an Atheist, it would be the jangling of Theistic metaphysicians.

Let me then state to you some of the controversies, which are supposed to need decision, before we can attain a reasonable conviction that there is a God, and that he deserves and accepts from us reverence, trust, and adoration.

“Can the human intellect form a positive conception of the Infinite and the Unconditioned? Can we investigate the nature and origin of the Unconditioned as a psychological phenomenon? Does our consciousness of the Finite involve a consciousness of the Infinite? Is our knowledge necessarily limited to phenomena? Can we know only the limited and the conditionally limited, or are we also capable of construing positively the unconditionally unlimited? Can we conceive either an absolute whole or an absolute part? Is our notion of the Infinite realized by a course of addition or progression, which, starting from the finite, seeks to reach the infinite? Can we infer the infinitely great from the indefinitely great? Is our notion of the Infinite a fact or ultimate datum of consciousness? Can inductive generalization draw from finite data more than they contain?”

Who can expect such questions to be even understood by any who have not made scholastic metaphysics and logic a special study? As I have, *more or less*, been acquainted with them myself for full forty-five years, I naturally have a positive opinion on some of the questions, indeed on most of them; but I should despair of Theism, if I believed it necessary to a sound belief that the believer should have discussed them at all. Some of the questions indeed, about the Unconditioned, and the Unconditionally Unlimited, might seem to have been started, not by a sincere Theist, but by a crafty Atheist, for the express purpose of throwing dust into our eyes. The attempt to establish any practical religion by such processes of thought, seems to me worse than useless, being in fact subversive of its avowed object. Not only scornful and presumptuous minds, but equally the reverential, the modest, and the philanthropic, are liable to be deterred from religious inquiry, if invited

into it through such a road. Justly may a philanthropic person say,—“Man needs the service of our energies: God, if there be a God, needs neither our aid, nor our worship: surely he cannot desire us to waste time and effort in questions of metaphysics, about which opposite professors are in endless controversy.”

And now, I might seem to have fulfilled my task, only that the metaphysicians will say to me, that I cannot justly disown their controversies, without showing how Theism can be established independently of them. To reply fully to such a challenge, would be to undertake a lecture on Theism. I therefore reply historically. I say, that Theism never *was* established by metaphysicians through metaphysical teaching; nay, that no appreciable effect on practical religion has ever been exerted by it. Historically, the belief in God has always rested on the common perceptions of common men. The fact relieves me from the imputation of rashness, when I say, that the business of Mental Science is here *critical* and negative only, and that philosophers err in thinking that Philosophy,—I mean scholastic science,—can be *creative* in religion. Its sole duty is to prune away the errors into which the ill-informed and half-cultivated intellect naturally falls; which duty I admit and maintain to be a very important one. But in order to fulfil it at all, philosophy must condescend to speak in a purely popular dialect, and altogether abstain from the hideous jargon so dear to metaphysicians. If it be true that their thoughts cannot be expressed in so copious and powerful tongue as the popular English, then the popular religion, it seems, must be unsound, until we learn to think and talk metaphysically. But if the great bulk of the human race have hitherto been incapacitated for sound

religion, I for one cannot have confidence that by means of scholastic culture a small oligarchy of mankind becomes the select priesthood of God.

The Natural History of Theism displays many phases, which might make an instructive volume, but in every case two stages at least seem inevitable. In the former, men discover in the great universe the action of Mind superior to man, and generally believe in many superior spirits, co-ordinate in rank, though among these one may be Supreme. The relation of God or the Gods to man is conceived of, as that of a Patron to a dependent. The Gods are supposed to care, *certainly* for men collectively, *probably* for some eminent men specially; and also to punish very flagrant guilt. Concerning the mental qualities of the Gods, equally as of their habits, the more sober nations abstain from thought in this first stage; those of wilder imagination confidently ascribe to them the enjoyments and pastime, the passions and vices, of mortals. This is the earlier or puerile stage of religion, and implies both deficient information concerning the great world, and immature faculties in the observers. In the second or manly stage of religion, it is recognised that there is no adequate ground for supposing more than one God. Spirits there may be, superior to men; if so, let them be called angels; but they must be, like us, dependent on God. On the doctrine of One God naturally follows the belief of his entire freedom from those disturbances of mind and clouds of passion to which man is subject; freedom therefore from caprices of love and hatred; though men may be very slow in working out the result that God is no respecter of persons, and uses no arbitrary favouritism. Because we cannot even guess at any reason which should mar his serenity, we attribute to him this perfectly unruffled and impartial state of mind. Moreover, as it is inevitable to believe that whatever high and pure

qualities and powers *we* possess, must be higher and perfect in *Him*, therefore, from consciousness of disinterested Love in ourselves, we attribute disinterested Love to Him. Naturally we can have no ideas whatever of a Divine Mind, but such as are suggested by consciousness of our own minds.

In shaping the second stage of Theism which I have thus sketched, a more cultivated intellect undoubtedly played a highly useful part in cutting away the superfluous fancies of barbaric imagination. But in European Christendom, at least as long back as the Mediæval Schoolmen, a pretentious Science has struggled to define things which ought to be left indefinite, and to transmute negatives into positives. The word Infinite, or Boundless, which meant that we are wholly incapable of assigning bounds to God, is pretended to be positive, or is exchanged for Absolute. The sobriety of declaring that we know no bounds to God's power, is thus turned into a scientific dogma that he is All-powerful; while with antiquity, when the word was used, it was only a burst of poetry, not a deliberate assertion concerning things which the human mind cannot know. From the same school came the notion that the belief in God rose out of speculating on Causation, and discovered (or, as an Atheist would say, invented) God as the First Cause; thus they carried the mind into the impenetrable cloudiness of Past Eternity and Cosmogony, that is, the birth of the Universe. The Hebrew book of Genesis does, indeed, tell of a Beginning of Creation, but very little is afterwards based on it; and the main stream of Hebrew literature is very far from excluding the idea of God's continuous perpetual creation. It treats all workings of the elements, organic and inorganic, as actings of the Spirit of God; so that each of us was created by God in birth, as truly as Adam originally. In the older view there was no such idea as that God in the

beginning created Matter : which is another example of dogmatizing where man is necessarily ignorant ; it is a later invention of metaphysical science. Again, the antagonism of God and Matter was a notion imported from Oriental metaphysics, and could have no place in the mind of Hebrew sages, who saw God permanent in nature, hereby agreeing with the doctrine of the most enlightened of the Greeks ; to which also, I believe, modern Theists more and more converge. The notion that God created matter, and set a machine at work ; wound up the spring, and then withdrew from the scene of action ; has been propagated by persons who meant to be philosophic, and were not. The result has been mischievous.

For in healthful and practical religion the relation of man to God is a present abiding fact, and the central point of knowledge. We come close to Him *now* and *here* ; in Him we live and move and have our being ; from Him come all our vital and mental powers. Our present contact with Him is the main, the cardinal point ; we are not thrown back into the history, if history it can be called, of a Creation in very dim distance, for our indirect origin from Him. We *apprehend* God in the present, and in the vastness of what we see ; we do not try to *comprehend* Him in the regions of invisibility, nor to grasp Eternity and Infinitude in our knowledge. If He is the life of our life, He is in the interior of our spirits and a witness to our consciousness. This is practical and popular religion, whose central origin and action is *now* and *here* ; but metaphysical and scholastic Theism, which begins at Past Eternity or First Causation, cannot be expected to give more heat than moonshine gives.

Now, the question between us and the Atheist is very simple, and goes into a short compass. In my opinion it needs no metaphysicians to mediate between us and him. The question is this : Were ancient

men wrong in seeing *Mind* in the Universe? For if they were wrong, we are wrong. I seem to myself to see Mind at work in the Universe as distinctly as I see it in my fellow-men. Each is a direct perception, which cannot be made clearer by argumentation. It was impossible to argue with that curious sect of ancient doubters who held that nothing beyond the existence of Self was certain. If any one assert that the world is a dream, he may rest assured that we cannot refute him. Of course I cannot prove that men's actions, which seem to me to imply purpose and mind, do not proceed from blind forces of Nature. I have no inward consciousness of any mind but my own. If any one tell me that my ascription of *design* to other men has no logical demonstration, and does not deserve belief, I have to confess that it is *not* logically demonstrable, and yet I insist that it does deserve belief—at least until refuted. He may bring proof that it is false, if he can; but it is useless to tell me that I cannot prove it. I do not pretend to prove that other men have minds; but I seem to myself to see it. The veracity of our *bodily* senses is not certain; they sometimes make mistakes: yet when the senses of many men concur, we accept the conclusions and are satisfied, even though there are cases in which appearances are deceptive. So is it with the *mind*. An individual may be rash and blundering. If I, one man, form judgments which most others, who have powers and advantages equal to mine, reject, it may be most reasonable to suspect that my judgments are unsound. But when we believe that we see a superior Mind in the Universe, and the rest of mankind with so great unanimity chime-in that some have defined Man as "a religious animal;" the direct perception of a Superior Mind is similar in kind to our direct perception of Mind in other men. No doubt, in the latter case, from the sameness of our wants and instincts, we have far greater facility in tracing the

course of mind, and are less in danger of mistaking the direction of design; but this does not interfere with the assertion that the process of thought is similar in the two cases.

I repeat, the sole question between us and the Atheist is—whether there are or are not marks in the Universe of superior Mind. What are the qualities, the power, the purposes of the Spirit whom we discern, and whether there are many such Spirits, are questions for Theists among themselves, with which the Atheist, while he keeps to his argument, has nothing to do. I cannot but think that, if the mist of metaphysics were blown aside by Theists, simple-hearted working-men would be less liable to the delusion that they are advancing in wisdom by adopting the Atheistic theory; and, if they saw Theists willing to follow truth wherever truth led, they would have less reason to give special honour to the courage which contradicts man's deep and wide-spread conviction that a God above us exists, blessed for ever, and the source of blessing.



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