

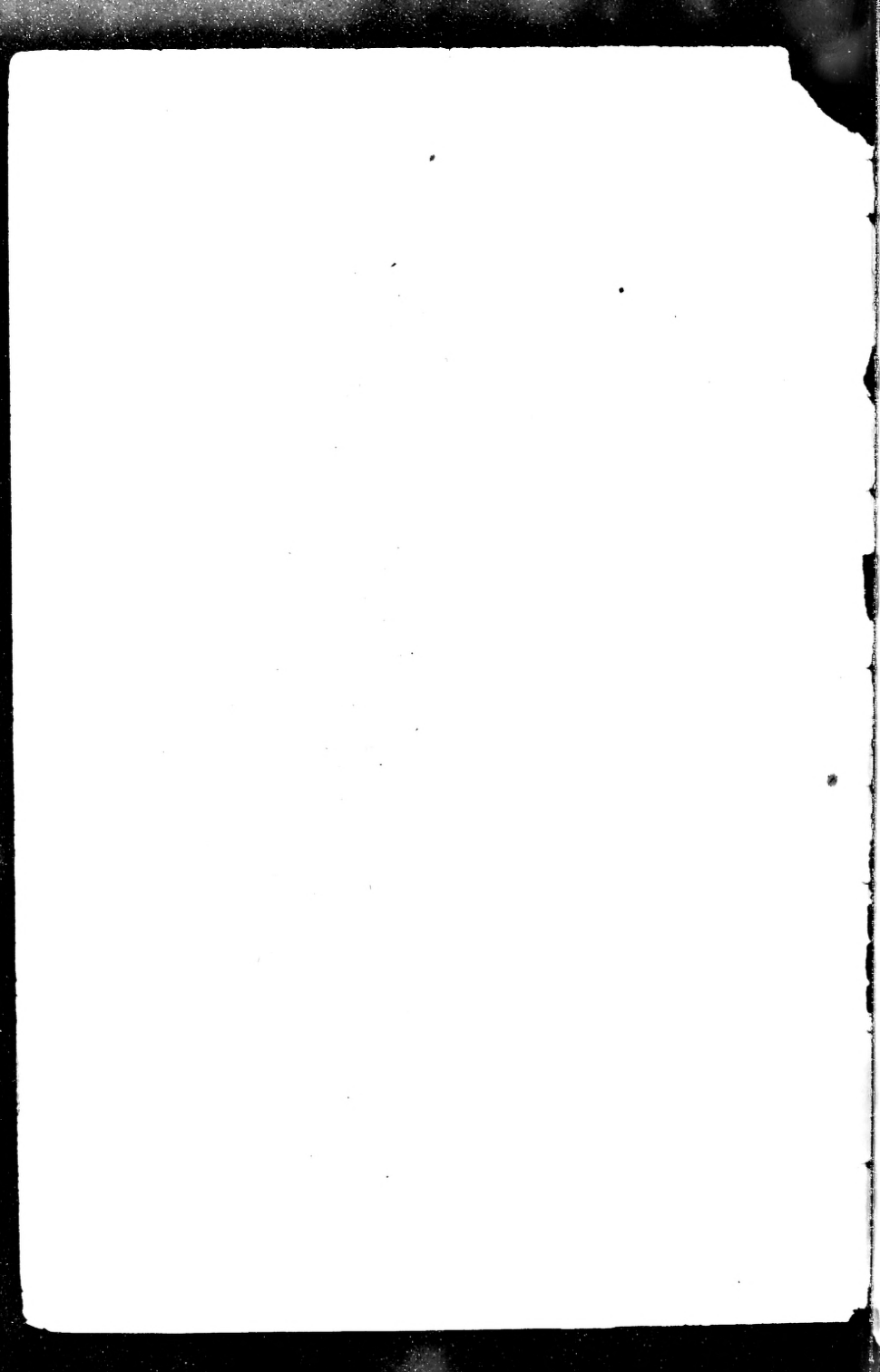
B 27 86

THE  
LOGIC AND PHILOSOPHY  
OF  
ATHEISM.

BY JOHN WATTS.



LONDON:  
AUSTIN & Co., 17, JOHNSON'S COURT, FLEET STREET, E.C.  
1865.  
PRICE THREEPENCE.



B 3296  
N 682

THE

## LOGIC AND PHILOSOPHY OF ATHEISM.

BY JOHN WATTS.

---

If any apology be necessary for calling attention to a subject that has been so often previously investigated, it may be found in the fact that current literature generally receives more patronage from the multitude than older, and, in many cases, abler productions. And further, every writer and every speaker will, as a rule, treat any given subject from a different point of view, and make especially clear some *one* point in connection with the particular question under consideration. And as Theistic advocates are so numerous, their advocacy so varied, and their expositions so frequent, no advantage that legitimately belongs to Atheistic propagandism should be lost sight of, and no effort omitted to be made that is calculated to set forth in all their strength those truths represented by the term *Atheism*. It would be the climax of folly to suppose that because error has once been exposed, the reign of truth is not far distant. That "truth is great and must prevail" we doubt not; but its speedy or deferred victory will depend, to a very great extent at least, upon the wisdom, the valour, and the persistency of those who undertake to secure its triumph. In the present instance nothing more will be attempted than to give a kind of panoramic view of the *Atheist's* position, and to exhibit the immense advantage he possesses over the orthodox Christian. Originality we care not to claim, as our

desire is rather to prove useful than to be considered great. It is not new truths that mankind requires—it is the understanding and adoption of those already proclaimed. Our duty, therefore, is to recapitulate the nature and tendency of the principles in which we believe, until misunderstanding or misrepresentation shall be impossible.

Perhaps it will be advisable at this preliminary stage to notice a supposition entertained by Christians as to the audacity of any man daring to call in question the existence of their supposed Deity. It is said that every nation, heathen or otherwise, believes in such a Being, and that it is only the few corrupt minds in any country who "make the wish father to the thought," and blaspheme that power in whom they "live, move, and have their being." In the first place we frankly say that did this presumed universal belief in Deity actually exist, it would have not the slightest weight with us; neither should Christians desire it to have any. When they tell us that we are each to be held responsible for our own beliefs and actions, they surely cannot deny the justice of each investigating for himself, and forming his own conclusions, independently of any other person or all other nations. It is useless to tell an Atheist what another man believes; he very properly answers that it is not another's faith but his own reason which he accepts as a guide. With Drummond he declares that "he who will not reason is a bigot; he who cannot is a fool; and he who dares not is a slave." But this oft-repeated statement in reference to the universality of belief is very far from being true, and we need not therefore further notice it. Any one who will take the trouble to read M. Pouchet's recently published volume on the "Plurality of the Human Race," will find instances cited of nations having no idea whatever of Divinity. Speaking of various African and Oceanic tribes, he describes them as having no notion of anything outside themselves. "Ideas, abstract ideas, arise from their own domain; the past, that which preceded their birth; the future, that which follows their death, does not occupy their attention; the present is their only business in life. They do not demand 'Whence do I come?' What am I? Where am I going?' And they have no idea whatsoever of

a Divinity!"\* These cases, it should be remembered, are not the only ones; almost all travellers bear the same or similar testimony. It follows, therefore, that Christians are neither right as to the truth of a universal belief in God, nor in the inference they would draw from such belief did it really exist. Instead of the idea of God being universal, we should rather say that in no country, nor in any one person is it to be found. Nothing is more easy or more prevalent than to pronounce the word God, and to say in him I believe. But in whom or in what? Ask a thousand persons to give some definition of God, or to explain their ideas of what he really is, or what they believe him to be, and you would have to pause for a reply. Strange as it may appear, we will venture the statement that the most logical answer would, we think, come from the Atheist. In the words of Allen Davenport, he may say:—

“You ask me what is God? And I  
Am no way puzzled to reply,  
My inward lights so clearly shine  
That heavenly things I may divine;  
And although but a finite creature,  
Tell what is God and what is Nature.  
Whatever can be seen or felt,  
Whatever can be heard or smelt,  
Whatever can be tasted, and all the mind can understand,  
All that our wisdom can conceive,  
All that in which we can believe;  
All o'er where Fancy ever trod, is Nature;  
All the rest is God”

And what the “rest” is no Theist ever told us. He that can form an idea of something more than everything is the man and the only man that can have any “idea” of God. Locke, who is often quoted as a Christian authority, was conscious of the confusion that existed in men’s minds as to what “God” is. His words are:—“How many amongst us are to be found, upon inquiry, to fancy God in the shape of a man sitting in heaven, and to have other absurd and unfit conceptions of him. Christians as well as Turks have had whole sects owning or contending earnestly for it, that the Deity was corporeal and of human shape.” To do Locke

---

\* Quoted by M. Pouchet, page 29.

justice, however, we are bound to say that he considered such conceptions of "Deity" to be confined to the "ignorant and uninstructed." But that equally absurd notions have obtained among the most learned philosophers the history of the world will readily prove. Socrates, for instance, defined God as the cause of the universe, a definition as unintelligible as the word God itself is. A self-existent universe never could have had a cause; and were the universe not self-existent, its cause must have been the effect of some previous cause, and so on *ad infinitum*. To speak of a *first* cause is only to indulge in Christian babblement. Aristotle, too, considered God to be "a mind immutable and impassable, an eternal and most perfect animal, perpetually employed in imparting motion to the universe." Upon reading which the late Julian Hibbert justly remarked, "It must be dull work to be eternally trundling a wheel-barrow, and perhaps hard work too for an incorporeal Being." Synesius, however, would make no compromise with common sense, but resolved (if the expression be allowable) to "go the whole hog." Apostrophising "Deity," he says, "Thou art a father and a mother, a male and a female; thou art voice and silence; thou art the fruitful nature of natures; thou art the father of all fathers; and being without a father, thou art thine own father and son. O source of sources, principle of principles, root of roots, thou art the unity of unities, the number of numbers, being both unity and number. Thou art one and all things, one of all things, and one before all things." Now if Synesius were not right in any one of his many descriptions, who can hope ever to successfully guess what the "Deity" really is? And it is useless for modern Christians to say that their idea of God is more rational than the descriptions just given; for whilst they are less wordy in their so-called definition, they are equally absurd. To say, as they do, that God is a spirit, is only to use another word of which they know nothing, to describe the nature of a Being in whom they believe, but of whom they have no idea, nor can they form of him the slightest conception.

If the preceding statements be true, are we not justified in saying, as Mr. Southwell has often remarked to us, that

Atheism is man's normal state, and that Theists are just like fishes out of water? The position of the Atheist may be described in a few words. He believes that something is, and that something always has been. He believes in the existence of Nature, by which he means the aggregate of matter or substance. And as the totality of things is all that he can form any conception of, together with his unavoidable belief that something always was, he is forced to the conclusion that Nature is eternal, without beginning and without end. Being eternal, he can only view it as self-existent, and as self-existence is the climax of attributes, it doubtless, he considers, includes all other attributes. Here the Atheist, who is generally spoken of as a negationist, appears as decidedly a positivist as it is possible to be. The Theist comes forth as the negationist, and assures the Atheist that in believing only in everything, he is in error. To be right he must believe in something more than everything, in a Being that existed before anything was, who occupies some place outside everywhere, and who created all that exists. The Atheist very properly replies, that it seems to him impossible that there ever was a time when nothing was; and if Nature were produced from something already in existence, whence came that something? It could never have been created if it as "something" always existed. The Atheist then inquires what this existence or something is which the Theist calls God. It cannot, he conceives, be matter, or it would be part of Nature, and the part could never be the cause of the whole. If it be not matter, it can neither be the part nor the whole of anything. If the universe be boundless and material, nothing immaterial can possibly exist. If a Being really do exist who created all things, the obvious question at once is, where was this Being before anything else existed? "Was there a time when the God over all, was God over nothing? Can we believe that a God over nothing began to be out of nothing, and to create all things when there was nothing. Is it, therefore, not easier to believe that this stupendous and mighty frame of Nature always was, infinite and eternal?" This appears to the Atheist to be the true state of the case, and although it explains not the why and the

wherefore of existence, it is far more consistent and logical than the gigantic assumptions of the Theist, who is favoured with no more light on the subject than the Atheist possesses. "What I hold to be the truth," says a well-known German writer, "shall be welcome to me, let it sound as it may; but I will know, and should this be impossible, thus much at least I will know—that it is not possible to know." This is the spirit underlying the logic and philosophy of Atheism. We adopt, therefore, without the slightest hesitation, those forcible words translated by Thomas Carlyle:—"What went before and what will follow me I regard as two black impenetrable curtains which hang down at the two extremities of human life, and which no living man has yet drawn aside. Many hundreds of generations have already stood before them, with their torches, guessing anxiously what lies behind. On the curtain of futurity many see their own shadows, the forms of their passions enlarged and put in motion; they shrink in terror at this image of themselves. Poets, philosophers, and founders of states have painted this curtain with their dreams, more smiling or more dark as the sky above them was cheerful or gloomy; and their pictures deceive the eye when viewed from a distance. Many jugglers, too, make profit of this our universal curiosity; by their strange mummeries they have set the outstretched fancy in amazement. A deep silence reigns behind this curtain; no one once within will answer those he has left without; all you can hear is a hollow echo of your question, as if you shouted into a chasm." Atheists, recognising the truth of these remarks, are content to leave to Theists the unenviable presumption of being able to draw back the curtain and present a clear view of what has been and of what is to be. They should remember, however, that even from their own stand-point:—

"Divines can say but what themselves believe;  
 Strong proofs they have, but not demonstrative;  
 For were all sure, then all minds would agree,  
 And faith itself be lost in certainty.  
 To live uprightly, then, is sure the best;  
 To save ourselves, and not to damn the rest."

The Theist comes forward, however, with what he considers to be a crushing argument. Thomas Cooper has taken it as



travelling companion through England and Scotland for some years past, and he makes it do duty still. It is said that things cannot produce what they have not. Matter hath not mind, or every atom of matter would contain mind. A table or a stone would be as intelligent as Thomas Cooper or Richard Weaver. If matter be not necessarily intelligent, mind must exist independently of matter, which cannot therefore be infinite or eternal. First, we would observe that to our minds it by no means follows that for intelligence to be a quality of matter it must necessarily belong to every atom of matter. Brightness is a quality of matter, but all matter is not bright. Neither is all matter hard—in fact we find a great quantity, with “intelligence,” to be very *soft*. The same may be said of colours and other qualities. The position taken by our friend Iconoclast in his various debates on this question is in reality the only strong and logical one. One substance—infinite or boundless—is affirmed; call it matter if you will—numerous modes of that substance exist. Each mode has its essential quality, and we should be no more surprised to find some matter without the quality of intelligence, than we are at finding some minus the quality of brightness. It is not true, either, that compound bodies do not possess qualities and properties not to be found in their elementary constituents. Any chemist could prove the contrary. Our old friend Robert Taylor used to keep his opponents to this point. “How is it that sulphur and oxygen by combination produce acid? For neither sulphur nor oxygen have acid. How is it that cold bodies produce heat (caloric)?” “How is it that nitrate of silver is a powerful caustic, when neither of its elementary constituents has the least causticity? These constituents are silver, nitrogen, and oxygen.” When these questions were recently put to Thomas Cooper, he replied by saying he did not believe in their truth. Mr. Taylor naturally smiled at so great a man being ignorant of these simple truths, and recommended him to publish “Chemistry made Easy for Pious Flats,” ignoring all experimental facts in connection with the science. He then quoted for Mr. Cooper’s enlightenment from Professor Fownes’s “Rudiments of Chemistry,” wherein he says—

“The various rocks, clays, sands, and soils, which compose the solid earth: the water of seas and rivers, the materials of plants and animals, are of a compound nature—that is, made up of two or more other substances, united or combined together in a manner so close and intimate, as not to be generally separable by any common means, and the compound so produced is almost always different in properties and appearance from the substances of which it is really composed.” This being true, why should we deny that under certain combinations of matter intelligence should be one of its qualities? But we are asked if we can conceive *how* non-intelligence can in any way produce intelligence. We, without the least reluctance, answer in the negative. And in return we may ask the Theist whether he can conceive the possibility of an immaterial Being, having neither “body, parts, nor passions;” having nothing whatever in common with material substance, working upon, moulding, and fashioning the entire universe, and all in it that lives, and moves, and has being? We, having only partial knowledge of Nature’s properties, remain suspensive. The Theist, with no more knowledge, undertakes to answer authoritatively, and to solve the great problem of human existence. Which is the more consistent we need not here state.

Theists should never accuse Atheists of dogmatism; for no one can be more dogmatic than the Theist. He says, for instance, that matter cannot be eternal, for whatever is eternal exists of necessity; that whatever exists of necessity must exist everywhere; that matter is not everywhere, or there could be no locomotion. This is certainly clearly, although not modestly stated. Why, we ask, is locomotion impossible if matter be everywhere? We find locomotion going on every day in places where matter is certainly not absent. A cab, for instance, may be driven along the public thoroughfare, and meet with no impediment to its locomotion from the air, which is matter, or from collision with a dog, or any small object. But if a house were to fall across the road locomotion would be impeded. The fact is, one kind, or rather one mode of matter is constantly replacing another, without the absence of matter in any one known

place. The argument too about the mind being distinct from and independent of the body is equally worthless. Theists say very pompously that we all know our minds are not our bodies, and our bodies not our minds. Of course we do; and we also know that our teeth are not our toe nails; but both our teeth and toe nails form parts of our body when it is in a perfect state. But from disease of some kind we may lose both our nails and our teeth, and from disease we may also lose our mind. That is, the normal functional activity of the brain may be arrested, and that intelligence, which is the result of such activity—by us called mind—is more or less lost also. If, on the contrary, the mind were something independent of the body; if it were some divine and immaterial principle, existing before the body did, and destined to live when the body has passed into other modes; surely the temporary disturbance of its present tenement would not affect its manifestation or destroy its power. If so, what hope can be entertained of immortality when the body is entirely transformed? If a healthy constitution is now necessary to the existence of mind, upon what principle of reasoning is it supposed that when the body ceases altogether to exist—the mind will live for ever in that world of which Christians dream?

It is argued, too, that mind must be independent of matter, from the fact that within an average period of about seven years every particle of matter constituting the human body is removed and a *new* body consequently formed, while memory, one of the attributes of mind, may continue cognisant of all the principal events of a lifetime, showing therefore that *it* had not changed with the material particles. But this conclusion falls to the ground immediately in face of the equally potent fact that the scar of a severe wound received in infancy by an octogenarian, may accompany him to the grave, notwithstanding that his body has been a dozen times renewed. The new particles of matter adapt themselves to the altered configuration of the injured part, and the scar therefore remains, and, by parity of reasoning, the new particles of matter constituting the mental organism also take to themselves the conditions of existence of those

which they have replaced. The muscular power of an arm, or the suppleness of the fingers of a pianist, may be the result of forty years of training, although the actual muscles themselves are but of seven years' growth; the vigour and clearness of the intellect may be the result of as many years of educational exercise, although acting through the medium of tissues equally recent in their formation as the muscular ones.

Paley admits in the thirty-third chapter of his "Natural Theology" the nonsensical idea of Deity. He says, "The Deity, it is true, is the object of none of our senses." This statement exactly coincides with our opinion; and yet men undertake to demonstrate his existence. Can it be that such men have lost their senses, and suppose that their fellow-men are suffering from the same calamity? A perusal of Gillespie's "Necessary Existence of God" would tend to confirm some such theory. Thomas Cooper, although a disciple, has written of Gillespie as being "eccentric," a very mild term, we imagine, if he be in the same state of mind as he was when he wrote his book. Iconoclast has just published "A Plea for Atheism," which is mostly devoted to an examination and complete refutation of Gillespie's propositions. We need not, therefore, refer to them at any great length. The propositions consist of well-selected jargon. The word Infinity is so much used that one would think Mr. Gillespie knew all about its signification, and yet there is no word upon which so much misunderstanding exists. It expresses simply a negation. As Sir William Hamilton says, "Infinite directly denotes only the negation of limits." The same author gives instances of the folly of talking about the infinite as though it could be comprehended. Here is one—"A quantity, say a foot, has an infinity of parts. Any part of this quantity, say an inch, has also an infinity. But one infinity is not larger than another. Therefore an inch is equal to a foot." We will only add in the words of Dr. Thomas Brown, in reference to this *a priori* argument—"It is a relic of the mere verbal logic of the schools, as little capable of producing conviction as any of the wildest and most absurd of the scholastic reasonings on the properties, or supposed pro-

perties, of entity and non-entity." This we verily believe, and having not the slightest faith in its efficacy to convince either one way or the other, we pass on to the consideration of an argument more calculated to arrest the attention and to convince the mind of the inquirer.

The so-called Design argument is considered by many Christians—lay and clerical—to be a complete answer to all Atheistic objections to Theistic theories. Very few of those who have escaped from the Theistic maze have had the good fortune to get clear without encountering in more than one avenue that terrible antagonist—"Design." He would point to the heavens, direct your attention to the stars and various planets, bid you consider their wonderful arrangement, and the regularity of their movements, and then demand to know if it be not true that—

The spangled heavens—their shining frame  
Their Great Original proclaim?

He would then bring you back to earth, and expatiate on the marvellous arrangements of terrestrial objects. The eye and the telescope, the watch and the human frame, are eagerly compared, preparatory to the final blow to all scepticism in this question. If we cannot believe that the telescope and the watch, with their marks of contrivance, were produced without an intelligent artificer, why should we for one moment doubt that the human frame, so wonderfully made, had not also an intelligent Being for its maker? Fallacious as this argument must appear to those who have properly investigated it, there are, it must be admitted, thousands who consider it conclusive evidence of Deity's existence. Paley is, we know, with many Theists, considered out of date, but with a vast majority of orthodox Christians his arguments are still considered to be unmistakably convincing. Thomas Cooper repudiates the idea of Paley not being conclusive and convincing; and although a long list of eminent names may be quoted against Paley's entire reasoning, Mr. Cooper, in unison with the general orthodox Christians, maintain that Paley has never yet been answered. "Paley Refuted in his Own Words," by Mr. G. J. Holyoake, is haughtily pooh-poohed by the peevish "Lecturer on Christianity." To our minds, however, no-

thing could be more conclusive than Mr. Holyoake's little volume. Paley concludes his chapter "Of the Personality of the Deity" in these words:—"Upon the whole, after all the schemes and struggles of a reluctant philosophy, the necessary resort is to a Deity. The marks of Design are too strong to be gotten over. Design must have had a designer. That designer must have been a person. That person is God." Now it should be borne in mind why Paley uses the word "must." Design *must* have had a designer. That designer *must* be a person. That person *must* be God. Why, we ask, *must* design prove a designer? Why *must* a designer be a person? Paley answers, because *experience* tells us so. Granted, say we. But then we also add, that *experience* also tells us that every "person" is an organised being. And if Deity be the designer of Nature, and if that designer be a person, then Deity must be an organised being; and as every organised being, according to Paley, bears marks of contrivance, Deity himself was designed. The designer of him must also have been designed; and go back as far as we may, we should never reach the "First Cause" of the Christian. Mr. Cooper and others say that a person need not imply an organised being, but an immaterial principle, an "unorganised Divine Being." In reply, we ask on what authority is such a statement made? It is certainly not made on Paley's authority—*experience*. Our experience has never proved any unorganised person; and Paley's entire argument is based on experience, and whatever that fails to prove weakens in the same ratio Paley's position. Mr. Holyoake's words are these:—"We ask *why* does design imply a designer? Paley answers, experience tells us so. Why does a designer imply a person? Paley answers, experience tells us so. Why does a person imply organisation? Nature gives the same answer, experience tells us so. The Natural Theologian asserts that the Designer of Nature must be a person, because, as he observes, we never knew design proceed except from a person. To which it may be added, that we never knew a person unassociated with organisation." If Mr. Thomas Cooper, or any one else, can refute these statements from Paley's position of experience, we will willingly listen to the refutation. Until that is

done, however, we shall insist that Paley has been refuted in his own words. But there is another fallacy in connection with this so-called Design argument—a fallacy that has often been exposed, and one that must be obvious at the very threshold of thought. Assuming, for a moment, that man, like a watch, was designed by some person, then the analogy is by no means complete. The watchmaker is not a creator of the material out of which the watch is made: he simply puts into certain order material placed before him. To make the analogy complete, a watchmaker should be placed in an empty room with no material allowed him, and told to produce forthwith a fine gold chronometer, just to “oblige Benson.” The Being believed in by Paley had nothing out of which to make the world. He first had to create something out of nothing, and then produce everything out of this something, of which no one knows anything.

Enough, then, of this so-called Design argument. A more important question is, “Is there Design in the universe?” We are disposed to reply in the negative. Of course instances may be cited where there is what appears to us to be perfect and harmonious arrangements of means to ends. Man’s eye is adapted for sight, his hands and arms for various necessary uses, his legs and feet for locomotion. The air and food are found to be necessary to life. The rain descends to nourish the earth, and the sun shines to produce vegetation, and to cheer the heart of man. All this, and much more, is quite true. But because we find such admirable adaptation in Nature, are we bound to conclude that it has been all designed by some external cause? May there not be in Nature an inherent adaptative power, and each mode of its manifestation have its essential characteristic? Natural occurrences seem to corroborate such a supposition. Certain modes of life continue only so long as the conditions continue necessary to their existence. And they exist, not because they were designed to exist, but because they cannot help existing. And when any interference of the necessary conditions takes place, by the action of some natural law, life becomes extinct, one species dies out, and another species takes its place. Humboldt,

with his giant-intellect, observed what we believe to be perfectly true, that were man not a designer we should never hear anything of design. Or as Kant says, "It is reflecting reason which brought design into the world, and which admires a wonder created by itself." When we see any given organ suited for the purpose to which it is assigned, we, or rather some persons, at once say, "There's design! without such a provision such and such an animal could not live." This general exclamation simply amounts to this. If a bird had not wings he could not fly, any more than a man could walk without legs. But, as Dr. Louis Büchner says, "The stag was not endowed with long legs to enable him to run fast, but he runs fast because his legs are long. He might have become a very courageous animal instead of a timid one, had his legs been unfit for running. The mole has short spatulated feet for digging; had they been different it would have never occurred to him to dig. Things are just as they are, and we should not have found them less full of design, had they been different."\*

In the serpent tribe feet are partly developed, although perfectly useless. Was this designed? Rudimentary organs which answer no purpose appear in various species of animals. Are they specially designed? Or, shall we not rather look upon them as forming links in the development of one species to another. The author just quoted further observes in his chapter on "Design in Nature"—"Is it by design that a foetus should fix itself and become developed in any other but its natural place, the uterus?—a case which frequently occurs, and conduces to the death of the mother. Or even that in such extra-uterine pregnancies, after the lapse of the normal time, pains are felt in the uterus, though nothing is to be expelled? There is a *healing power* of nature in its usual sense, as little as there is a *vital power*. The organism proceeding in certain definite directions frequently adjusts morbid disturbances. At other times the contrary occurs. The existence of certain specifics against certain diseases, is frequently quoted as a striking argument in favour of design in nature. But there are no

---

\* Force and Matter. Page 91.



remedies which heal definite diseases with certainty and under all circumstances, and can be looked upon as intended to heal them. All rational physicians deny the existence of specific remedies in the above sense, and are of opinion that the effects of medicines are not the result of a specific neutralisation of the disease, but must be ascribed to very different causes, mostly accidental. Hence we must also abandon the theory that nature has created various plants to act as antidotes—a theory which imputes an absurdity to a creative power, which is to have created an evil with its antidote, instead of omitting the creation of either. A creative power acting with design could not have been guilty of so useless an act.” “One of the most important facts which speaks against the theory that nature acts with conscious design, is the production of monstrosities. The unsophisticated human mind could so little reconcile these phenomena with the belief in a creator acting with design, that they were formerly considered as indicative of the wrath of the gods; and they are, even at present, not unfrequently looked upon as punishments from heaven. The author saw in a veterinary cabinet, a goat fully developed in every part, but born without a head. Can we imagine anything more absurd than the development of an animal, the existence of which is impossible from the beginning?” “The existence of dangerous animals has ever been a thorn in the side of theologians, and the most comical arguments have been used to justify their existence; with what little success, is proved by the assumption of those religious systems which consider sin as the cause of that abnormality. According to Meyer and Stilling, dangerous reptiles and insects are the consequence of the curse pronounced on the earth and its inhabitants. Their frequently monstrous form, etc., is made to represent sin and destruction! The old German heathens looked upon these animals as evil spirits, from which all diseases originated. These whimsical explanatory attempts prove how little was effected in showing the usefulness or the design in these troublesome and disgusting creatures. We know, on the other hand, that very innocent, or even useful, animals have become extinct, without nature taking any means to preserve their existence. Such, within his-

torical times, was the case with the Irish elk, the *rytina stelleri*, the dodo, etc. There are other useful animals which are constantly diminishing, threatening to become extinct; whilst very many injurious animals, as field mice, are so fruitful, that their extinction cannot be thought of. Locusts and migratory pigeons form swarms which darken the horizon, and bring destruction, famine, and death over the spots they alight upon. 'Whoever,' says Giebel, 'expects to find in nature nothing but wisdom, conformity, and design, let him exercise his acumen in the study of the natural history of the tape-worm. The main object of its life consists in the production of eggs, the development of which can only be effected by the sufferings of other creatures. Millions of such eggs perish; some few are developed and transformed into a sucking and productive scolex, the progeny of which again produce eggs which putrify in the excrements. In this process there is, according to human conception, neither beauty, wisdom, nor design.'" "If green woodpeckers," says Darwin, "alone had existed, and we did not know that there were black and pied kinds, I dare say that we should have thought that the green colour was a beautiful adaptation to hide this tree-frequenting bird from its enemies." The author of the "Trial of Theism" puts the fallacy of this design argument in a very comic yet forcible manner. "The Natural Theologian praises the divine contrivance which has given man *two eyes*. They would have been equally rapturous had he had four, so that he could have looked east, west, north, and south at the same time; and successive Paleys would have celebrated the providential arrangement which enabled policemen and sentinels to conduct four-fold observations without turning their heads. Again, if man, like Polyphemus, had but *one eye* given him, Dr. Paley would have proved it impossible that he could ever have seen at all with two; or if he had, that he would see double. . . . Had man only *one arm* no Natural Theologian would have missed the other; had he three they would find reason to praise the Trinitarian arrangement, and no doubt declare it to be a mystic symbol for the confutation of Unitarians." This passage, although funny, is not devoid of serious truth.

And we can only now add that whoever relies on the so-called design argument to prove the existence of the Christian's Deity, relies indeed upon a broken reed.

We come now to the really practical part of the logic and philosophy of Atheism. To prove that some kind of Deity exists would not satisfy the Christian. His attributes must be demonstrated. He must be shown not only to be powerful, but to be also wise and good; not only to be our Creator but also our loving Father. It must be shown that he not only desired to see us live, but that he also wished us to live happily. And the happiness enjoyed by one must be equally attainable by all, for the Christian's God is no respecter of persons. In combatting such theories the Atheist really proves himself to be a friend to the human race. He sees the many organised systems of superstition that have grown out of a belief in Deity. He knows how these systems tend to enslave the mind and to tax the material resources of the great mass of mankind. He knows how much happier the world in general would be if the chain of superstition could once be snapped, and if men could be taught to know the truth, to obey the truth, and to be guided by the truth. He knows it to be impossible for the Christian's Deity to exist, with all his reputed attributes, simultaneously with such an ill-governed world as that in which we live. And he looks upon Christian teachers, who are constantly preaching the contrary doctrine, as the great enemies of human improvement. This belief is a sufficient justification for Atheistic propagandism, and a sufficient answer to those who say that we are mere hair-splitting negationists, or noisy logic-choppers. If Theism were simply a speculative question, to be discussed at our leisure or avoided at our pleasure, having no practical influence over human society, producing no hatred in families and impeding no progress in states, then we should care as little about discussing the possibility of Deity's existence as we should to debate whether or not the moon is made of green cheese. But when thousands are every day told that they have a heavenly Father, who watches over them, and who will see justice done to them, and when we know how heavily they are taxed and how much

they are compelled to pay for such a monstrous delusion, we consider ourselves justified at any risk in exposing such a disastrous imposition. Paley saw the inequalities of the arrangements of society, and endeavoured to explain them away. Speaking to the poor he says, "How much is activity better than attendance; beauty than dress; appetite, digestion, and tranquil bowels, than all the studies of cookery, or than the most costly compilation of forced, or far-fetched dainties." And in the same chapter he says, "It is a happy world after all. The air, the earth, the water, teem with delighted existence. In a spring noon or summer evening, on whichever side I turn my eyes, myriads of happy beings crowd upon my view. 'The insect youth are on the wing.' Swarms of new-born flies are trying their pinions in the air. Their sportive motions, their wanton mazes, their gratuitous activity, their continual change of place, without use or purpose, testify their joy and the exultation which they feel in their lately discovered faculties. A bee amongst the flowers in spring, is one of the most cheerful objects that can be looked upon." These extracts are intended by Paley to show the goodness of Deity, as well as his personality. But is it not the veriest special pleading? Who doubts that many of the rich become deteriorated for want of activity? Who doubts that beauty is better than dress? Who doubts that a good appetite is better than forced niceties? But who does not also know that thousands die from overwork? Who does not know that there are thousands with neither beauty nor proper dress? Who does not know that there are thousands who have good appetites, but nothing to satisfy them? And who will not admit the immense difficulty of believing in the existence of an all-powerful, all-good, and perfectly just Being while such injustice is allowed to continue, and such misery allowed to exist? Does not the human heart untainted with superstition revolt against such misgovernment; and would it not be better to adopt every possible means for its removal, rather than deceive its victims with promises of an upper and a better world?

However impregnable the logical position of the Atheist may be, there will always exist numbers of persons without

the courage to look fearlessly at his principles, or to regard him in any other than a prejudicial light. He will, by many whose judgments have been warped by priestly teachings, be considered either deficient in intellect or depraved in heart. It is a curious fact in connection with human nature, that many men who have no regard for morality; who care little for the welfare of those by whom they are surrounded; whose duties as parents, neighbours, and citizens are seldom if ever properly fulfilled—such men, we say, are pretty firm believers in Deity, and will listen to no argument from the Atheist, lest he should rob him of his God. So terrible is the effect of superstitious teaching when young, that many men remain children all their lives. We never attempt to take God out of the world, for the best of all reasons—we have never been able to find him in the world. Could we be convinced that a God exists, who may properly be considered the loving and wise parent of the human family; a Being on whom we could all rely for help in the time of need, for solace in the hour of sorrow, and for assistance when in danger and distress, we should gladly recognise such existence, and be thankful for such a blessing. But all our knowledge seems to confirm our belief that, however much we may lament it, the world has no such superintending Being as the Deity believed in by Christians. Science proclaims, with imperial authority, that we are under the dominion of general laws—laws of nature. “That whether there be a Deity independent of Nature, or whether Nature be God, it is still the God of the iron foot, that passes on without heeding, without feeling, and without resting; that Nature acts with a fearful uniformity, stern as fate, absolute as tyranny, merciless as death; too vast to praise, too inexplicable to worship, too inexorable to propitiate; it has no ear for prayer, no heart for sympathy, no arm to save. We reap from it neither special help nor special knowledge; it protects itself from our curiosity by giving us only finite powers; its silence is profound, and when we ask its secret, it points to death. Yet if we are wise to learn from this great mystery before which creeds are shattered and dogmas are cancelled, it is a magnificent monitor. Men fable to us the future with

fearful presumption; they dazzle us with a world they have never visited, amaze us with images they have never seen, alarm us by the ideal and cheat us of the real; and betray us, by a false dependence, to our own destruction." In the logic and philosophy of Atheism there is no superstition, no supernatural religion. With us the proper study of mankind is man, and whatever tends to develop his mental and moral nature, and increase his comfort and happiness, comes within the scope of Atheistic philosophy. Every day facts compel us to reject the Christian teaching concerning Deity. With such a faith we could not believe that thousands would be allowed to awake every morning not knowing where or how to obtain food during the day, and when night approaches have to make the bare earth their resting place, and the canopy their only covering. If such a Being did exist, we should never witness, as we now do, the daily agony of some fellow-creatures, shivering with cold and faint with hunger, lying in some corner of a street whose inhabitants are securely housed, with wealth at their command, and ease and plenty for their daily attendants. If such a Being did exist, that which man laments his inability to remove, God would surely prevent occurring. We agree with Bacon that "it were better to have no opinion of God at all, than such an opinion as is unworthy him." And surely we must form an unworthy opinion of him if we suppose he allows so much misery to exist when he has the power to prevent it. Every week our newspapers contain accounts of starvation and of disease engendered by the want of the necessaries of life. And the clergy—the special servants of God—instead of demanding improved dwellings and proper means of sustenance for those unfortunate victims, solicit money to repair one church, and to build another. The only consolation they offer to the starving victims of Christian misrule, is the blood of the Lamb, when a pound of meat would be far more acceptable. Man's "future life" is considered, or rather taught by priests to be all-important, and churches and chapels are deemed necessary to the realisation of heavenly bliss. Hence the present misery, disease, and starvation are nothing compared with the calamities that would ensue if the spiritual

wants of the poor were neglected. Theistic philosophy is that we are simply in this life journeying to our everlasting home, and that, therefore, our first consideration should be to make and to keep our peace with God, no matter how miserable we are with man. Atheistic philosophy, on the contrary, is, that our first concern should be to ascertain *what* we are and what are our duties, the performance of which would secure to all, or at least to the majority, health, wealth, happiness, and peace.

One word as to the usual and oft-repeated statement that the Atheist's faith is a cold and barren one, and that the Atheist cannot be a truly happy man. We reply that a greater mistake could not be entertained. We are surely as happy as any Christian can be. If we have not the consolation spoken of by Christians, arising from the prospect or anticipation of heavenly bliss, neither have we the misgivings, doubts, or fears as to the misery of hell. The magnificence of the universe; the comparative regularity of her operations; the grandeur of her seasons; the beauty of her products, all afford equal joy to the Atheist as to the Christian. To him—

“Not the lightest leaf but trembling teems  
With golden visions and romantic dreams.”

And as in life, so in death. The Atheist, though not fearing death, certainly loves life. He loves to see the lives prolonged of his relatives and his friends. He laments the loss—when it comes—of those who have shared his happiness, and participated in his sorrows. He would even be glad to see reasons to cherish a hope that they would all meet again in another and a better world, where they may enjoy an eternity of bliss denied them on this earth. And when life's duty is accomplished; when Nature warns him of approaching decay; when friendship, love, and life are about to forsake him, he can fearlessly look back on a life the secrets of which he could never fathom, but the recognised duties of which he had endeavoured to fulfil. And lastly, as the chilling messenger from the tomb approaches, with Death's imperial summons, he can meet the inexorable envoy without fear, without sadness, and without despair.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR :

The Origin of Man, 2d. The Christian Theory of the End of the World Refuted, 2d. The Christian Doctrine of Man's Depravity Refuted, 2d. The Devil: who he is, and where he came from, 2d. Who were the Writers of the New Testament? 2d. Was Christ the Best of Men and the Wisest of Teachers? 2d.

London: Austin & Co., 17, Johnson's Court, Fleet Street.

---

WORKS BY ICONOCLAST.

A Plea for Atheism, price 3d., containing a reply to William Gillespie's argument for the Necessary Existence of Deity. Why do Men Starve? 1d. The Atonement, 1d.

Polemical Essays, price 1s. This volume contains the following essays:—The Real Representation of the People. Poverty: its Effect on the Political Condition of the People. Prohibition of Free Speech. Jesus, Shelley, and Malthus. Who was Jesus Christ? What did Jesus Teach? Is there a God? A Few Words about the Devil.

Debate on the Existence of Deity with Thomas Cooper, with a Plea for Atheism, 1s. Debate with the Rev. Dr. Baylee, on God; Man, and the Bible: the only debate on the Socratic method of reasoning; 6d. Christianity and Secularism Contrasted: two nights' debate with W. M. Hutchings, Esq., at Wigan; 1s. New Testament Christianity: three nights' debate with the Rev. J. H. Rutherford; 6d. Two nights' discussion with Mr. Mackie (Editor of the *Warrington Guardian*); revised by the Disputants; 8d. Prohibition of Free Speech, a Letter to the Judges of the Court of Common Pleas; with a report of the proceedings in *Bradlaugh v. Edwards*; 2d.

London: Austin & Co., 17, Johnson's Court, Fleet Street.

---

Now complete, Cloth, 2s. 6d. (also to be had in Penny Numbers),

HALF-HOURS WITH FREETHINKERS.

Edited by J. Watts and Iconoclast.

Austin & Co., 17, Johnson's Court, Fleet Street, E.C.

---

Professor Pusey and his party are requested to reply to the arguments advanced in

THE DOCTRINE OF ETERNAL TORMENT REFUTED.

By MELAMPUS (Dr. Sexton).

This pamphlet, which exhausts the entire question, from a Biblical point of view, may be had (price 3d.) of G. Abington, 107, Shoe Lane, and of Austin & Co., 17, Johnson's Court, Fleet Street. Austin & Co. will send three copies post free on the receipt of nine stamps.

---

THE ANTIQUITY OF THE HUMAN RACE.

By George Sexton, M.A., M.D. Price 2d.

London: Austin & Co., 17, Johnson's Court, Fleet Street.

---

TRACTS BY WILLIAM MACCALL.

Individuality of the Individual, 6d. Doctrine of Individuality, 6d. Sacramental Services, 6d. Lessons of the Pestilence, 6d. Creed of a Man, 4d. Commercial Restrictions, 3d.

Trubner & Co., Paternoster Row.

Outlines of Individualism. Price 6d.—Jenkins, 286, Strand.  
Charles Napier, 2d. Song of Songs, 2d.—Truelove, 240, Strand.