

When we speak of Atheism proper, we speak of a phase of the controversy touching a great First Cause of creation, which has, for reasons hereafter to be given, almost passed away. The word is not in favour; it is renounced even by those whose reasonings naturally lead to it; let other terms be used and they have no objection to a disguised god, either nameless or with the name

they prefer ; but Atheism they reject as unphilosophical. But, before reaching this more modern phase of the scientific Materialistic form of it, we must make some remarks on Atheism proper, which has aimed to rid the creation of a Creator and of a God.

Is
Atheism
possible ?

1. The question may be fairly asked. Is blank Atheism or Antitheism possible to the human mind ? And the answer must be finally given that it is not. The appeal may be made to Scripture : an appeal which ought to be allowed, whether for the conclusion of all strife or not, since it is undeniable that the Bible contains the largest and noblest collection of the world's religious thoughts. Throughout the whole of this book, which gives its testimony to the whole variety of human error, there is no single allusion to men from whose minds the thought of God is erased. The book demonstrates everything about the Deity but His existence : it never descends to argue with an Atheist, for it never supposes that it speaks to such a man. Besides the wicked who say unto God, *Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways*, it singles out the fool who *hath said in his heart, there is no God* ; but these are evidently, as the context proves, the same persons. The theoretical Atheist is not in the Bible. Nor will a believer in revelation allow that he exists in the world at large. Wherever the word of revelation is sent its mission is to proclaim, not the existence of God, but the sin of man, the need of a Deliverer, and a Deliverer provided. All nations are supposed to require only that the Unknown God, Whom they ignorantly worship, be declared unto them. And in every part of the world that faculty to receive the supernatural has been found, which is, if not the belief in God, yet at least the denial of Atheism. The appeal must be made to fact and the testimony of history, past and present : "What people is there," said Cicero, "or what race of men, which has not, without traditional teaching, some presentiment of the existence of gods ?" That nations may have been found in the past, and tribes of savages now, which have no clear notion of one Supreme Being, and no worship of any kind, may be admitted. But the very lowest waifs and strays of humanity have always manifested the existence of that hidden mystery of its origin which owns affinity with the supernatural. And that is all our present argument requires.

Job xxi.
14.
Ps. liii. 1.

De Nat.
Deor. i. 16.

2. Atheism proper, as distinguished from other forms of the error that goes astray from God, has mostly sprung from moral causes, and denotes therefore a system of thought which the healthiest instinct of mankind has always abhorred. The early history of our race bears witness that the Atheist was counted unworthy of any respect. The denial of the existence of the gods was proscribed and punished. Even those systems of thought which tended to the removal of faith were careful to disguise their attack on the gods. Epicurus in words acknowledged their possible existence. After the appearance of our Lord professed atheism was very rare, until the general corruption of society in the last century. And, in fact, the term in theology is reserved for a state of feeling produced by many diversified moral causes, which culminated in the excesses of the French Revolution.

Reasons of
Atheism.

3. Since that time Atheism has been scientific, philosophical, and generally disguised under the name of AGNOSTICISM: certainly the most refined of all its forms, and that which most directly mocks and insults the dignity of human nature. It shrinks from avowed Atheism; and will not dare to say there is no God. It shrinks from Materialism, and will not dare to say that the forces of matter account for all phenomena. It simply declares the impossibility of knowing what the tremendous FORCE is that controls all things. There is no more deadly form of the great error of mankind than this which undermines every foundation.

Agnosticism.

4. There may be said to be a modern ANTI-THEISM, that is not content with throwing off the fetters of a Deity, but must needs argue against the possibility of the existence of such a God as the Scriptures present. Atheism is content with the privative particle, Antitheism is active and aggressive. There is, however, a restraint upon the minds of men, and a decency in society, which forbid the explosion of this kind of sentiment. When it does appear it is at best, or at worst, little other than a modern Manichæism or Dualism. The existence of God is not blankly denied; but the evil that exists is made an argument that, if a God is, He must be limited in many respects, and not by any means the Being Whom we reverence and adore. There is much latent Manichæism in society and in literature; many fall back upon two deities who are hardly conscious of doing so. However, the God Whom the

Anti-
Theism

- Isa. xlv.** Scriptures reveal must be accepted as He is, even though He says,
6, 7. *I form the light and create darkness.*