

and adore it. Our Lord was the Firstborn of the new creation when He began its life in Himself; and He is the Firstbegotten, or the Beginning of the creation of God, which had its origin in Him.

MATERIALISTIC ATHEISM.

Mathe-
rialism.

At the opposite pole of Pantheism stands Materialism as the philosophical or scientific antagonist of the Scriptural doctrine of the Creator and creation: opposite poles, however, of one and the same sphere of thought. Pantheism gives the notion of God the pre-eminence, all things phenomenal being His eternal but ever-changing vesture; Materialism gives matter the pre-eminence, as the only substance that is, and regards what men call God as the unknown law by which that substance is governed in all its evolutions. Strictly speaking, Materialism proper has no place here. It is simply a question of science and scientific speculation; being, as touching the created universe, a pure negative, that can neither prove itself nor disprove anything else.

COMMON PRINCIPLES.

Principles

Certain fundamental principles are common to the Materialism of all ages. Denying the distinction of matter and spirit it denies the existence of spirit altogether; and soul or spirit, being only one particular form of the existence or function of matter, is immortal only in the sense that matter is indestructible and in some form or other will for ever go on producing the same phenomena. Religion has no place in this system. It makes that the strange fantasy which it is the unaccountable habit of the brain of man almost universally to beget: all its hopes and fears and aspirations perish with the organism that gave them birth. Discarding religion, it nevertheless has always prided itself on being a philosophy. As such, it must of necessity investigate the origin of things. One of the eccentricities of what we call thought is that matter must seek to know its own beginning, and the reason of its existence. Its futile speculations perish, like its religion, with every individual thinker's brain; yet, like its religion, these are transmitted from age to age. But its questions are never answered.

Thinking matter can only say of itself that it must always have existed since it now exists; that it knows nothing about any power that could have brought it into being; that it has no explanation whatever of the difference between itself as inanimate, and itself as endowed with life; and, in short, that it can only say, unconsciously echoing the eternal truth which it will not receive, "I am that I am." If it is not its own creator it at least will know of no other. But the very word creation is abhorrent to the system from beginning to end.

History**HISTORY OF MATERIALISM.**

These fundamental principles, however, have been variously moulded, from generation to generation. There is a history of Materialism as there is a history of Pantheism and Dualism. With that theology has nothing directly to do, but it may be of indirect advantage to indicate the lines of development as they have been directed consciously or unconsciously by opposition to revealed truth. All the principles of Materialism were laid down by ancient heathenism; they have been asserted in direct opposition to Christianity as a revelation of God; and, lastly, they are now sought to be established in the interests of pure science, which answers every Christian suggestion by either perfect indifference or an appeal to universal nescience. A few words on each of these points in its order.

ANTIQUITY.**Ancient
Mate-
rialism.**

The Materialism of ancient times was atheistic; and, as such, it professed antagonism to the predominant schools of thought, Eastern and Western. Epicurus, an Athenian philosopher of the fourth century before Christ, is sometimes regarded as its founder.

Epicurus.

From the remains handed down to us we gather that his system contained most of the ideas which rule modern thought on this question. He set out with the principle which Lucretius, his disciple, has thus formulated: *Ex nihilo nihil, in nihilum nil posse reverti*. The universe he regarded as infinite: infinite in the number of bodies, infinite in the space that holds them. The elements of which all bodies are constituted are indivisible, *ἄτομα*, and unchangeable, *ἀμετάβλητα*. These atoms, endowed from

eternity with movement which makes them meet, combine into aggregates, whether smaller or larger as in the celestial spaces. As to this world, τὸ πᾶν ἐστὶ σῶμα. What we know we know through our senses; and when the organs perish the functions perish. Epicurus entirely dismissed the idea of Providence. If he admitted the existence of gods, it was only in the interest of prudence, the one criterion of his morals. "All is false that is commonly said about the gods: there is no truth in the chastisements they are supposed to inflict on men, nor in the rewards they assign to the good." "There are gods, and the knowledge we have of them is certain; but they are not what the vulgar suppose. The impious man is not he who refuses to believe in the gods of the common people, but he who accepts them as they do." His was an Atheism disguised, as Cicero says: "Video nonnullis videri Epicurum, ne in offensionem Atheniensium caderet, verbis reliquisse deos, re sustulisse." Thus Epicurus gathered up the fragments of Leucippus and Democritus, and gave them through Lucretius a form ready for future science. And, as his physical system anticipated much that modern times have more fully formulated, so his moral system was a favourable sketch of the highest ethics of Materialism. With him virtue is only the means, the prudential means, to the end of peace and tranquillity. While Plato sought the sovereign good in resemblance to God, and Zeno in conformity with universal law, Epicurus went no farther than the attainment of as near an approach as possible to the tranquil rest of nature, and the utmost enjoyment of life. *Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die*, is St. Paul's account of the ethics down to which this system surely descends or gravitates by its own inherent tendency. 1 Cor. xv. 32.

ATHEISM OR ANTITHEISM.

Atheism.

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