

MATERIALISM.

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“But there is a spirit in man.”—Job xxxii. 8.

I believe there is a latent infidelity in the heart of every man, which can never be removed, till the Spirit of God quicken the dead soul into spiritual life. Man, in his natural state, being dead in trespasses and sins, can neither realize spiritual things, nor feel a sense of their supreme importance. There may not be a positive disbelief of divine things. Their existence may be admitted, and yet their power may not be felt. And hence it is that men, having a natural dislike to the truth of God, and an inability fully to realize it, are so apt to imbibe erroneous views, or fall into downright infidelity. Till the natural unbelief of the heart is removed, a man will always be ready to fall into outward and positive unbelief.

Unbelief has assumed different forms in different ages. During the last century atheism prevailed extensively. That has given way, in the present day, to pantheism, which denying the existence of a personal God, and representing God, in every thing, is scarcely, if at all any better. During the same period, among those who had not gone thus far, a disbelief of revealed religion had taken possession of the minds of many; and an utter contempt for it was expressed not unfrequently both in books and conversation. From the beginning of this century things took a turn for the better. Formal infidelity was written down; and the genuineness and authenticity of Scripture established by irresistible argument, so that among intelligent and well read men, disbelief in revelation scarcely dared show itself. It was an earnest time; and men were in earnest about religion, as well as

every thing else; and the effects of this are seen in the general respect manifested for religion, in the improved appearance of churches and church-going habits of the people; in the zeal for, and success of, missionary enterprises,—in the improved tone of moral feeling, and energetic efforts to promote the social comfort, and moral well-being of the masses. Again, the tide has turned, and the natural enmity of the heart to God's truth is just manifesting itself in another way.

Among unbelievers in the present day there is generally some respect expressed for the Scriptures, as venerable productions of antiquity, more or less authentic, as containing, among heaps of questionable matter, portions of truth, which may be sifted out, and ascertained by the careful exercise of reason. This view proceeds of course, upon the denial of the inspiration of the Bible, and tends to destroy all confidence in it; yea, to render it utterly worthless, and incredible;—for its authors claim inspiration, and if this claim can be disproved, then of course it follows that they are utterly untrustworthy.

There is another class of men, who profess great respect for the Bible, admit its divine inspiration, and express a desire simply to embrace and follow out what they believe to be its teachings, and yet reject some of the most important doctrines which the great body of Christians hold dear, and which have been embraced, with very few exceptions, by all the most learned and competent interpreters, both in ancient and modern times. One of the doctrines rejected by this class of men, is that of the