

The Catholic.

Quod semper; quod ubique; quod ab omnibus.

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ORIGINAL.

AGAINST MATERIALISM.

... cogitaverunt, et erraverunt; excecavit enim illos malitia eorum. Et nescierunt sacramenta Dei; neque mercedem speraverunt justitia; nec judicaverunt honorem animarum sanctarum. quoniam Deus creavit hominem inexterminabilem; et ad imaginem similitudinis sue fecit illum.—Sap. Cap. 2. v. 21. &c.

These things they thought, and were deceived; for their own malice blinded them. And they knew not the secrets of God; nor hoped for the wages of justice; nor esteemed the honour of holy souls. For God created man incorruptible, and to the image of his own likeness he made him." &c.—Wisdom, Ch. 2. v. 21.

THERE are no notions so very absurd and extravagant, that man, when left to his own conjectures on his origin and last end, has not entertained of himself. I need not mention the dreams of a Pythagoras, and of other Pagan philosophers, whom our modern freethinkers, so barren in conceits of their own, seem proud in following. Even the *Metempsychosis*, or transmigration of souls, not only of one human being to another; but of men to brutes, birds, insects, and fishes; has found in all ages down to the present times, persons capable of adopting it for their creed, in spite of all its revolting absurdity. Indeed, what is it that man has not fancied and believed of himself, except what he really should have fancied and believed?

There are however two points, which the ancient Pagans broached; and which our modern infidels seem more fond of inculcating than any thing beside: *the eternity of matter*; and *the materialism of the soul*. Though these are too absurd to require serious refutation; yet, as they are so often urged upon us by our modish theorists, who would have their admirers more remarkable for their credulity than they themselves are for their incredulity; it may not be amiss to say a few words on these heads.

The Pagans from mere ignorance ventured these conjectures; having lost amid the plurality of their Gods the proper notion of the Deity; with nothing to guide them in their researches after truth, amid the murky mazes of long established superstition, but the distorted rays and faint glimmerings of their clouded reason; they saw this mighty universe, in the midst of which they found themselves placed; and could distinguish among all the Gods they worshipped none so great as in their conception was able to cope with such immense materials: to mould the boundless whole into its present perfect form; much less to give birth to it, and call it up from nothing. It was therefore quite impossible for such not to imagine it eternal. Who, in their ideas, would give it a beginning? Which

of all their Gods could originate and realize the stupendous design? It was therefore natural for them to suppose it self-existing; prior even, and, though passive, in some sense superior to their imaginary Deities. A Spinoza's boasted system of Materialism, and all the extravagant notions of his followers, are but grounded on the ignorant surmises of the benighted Pagans, groping their way, and reasoning at a venture amid the thick incumbent and settled gloom of Idolatry.

What more exalted notions could these entertain of the soul? Or what could they suppose it to be more excellent, than a refined portion of the eternal mass? A *tenuis aura*, or a light and subtle vapour? A *scintillula quadam ignis aetherii*; a small spark of ethereal fire, uniting itself after death to the original whole; and losing itself as a diminutive stream, in the universal abyss? And is not this the very idea which our modern Infidels have taken up; and, decking it forth, according to their own fancy, they offer it to the public as a precious and important discovery of their own.

The truth is, these silly reasoners, who must think those even sillier than themselves, who are capable of crediting their strange assertions; advance their ridiculous absurdities, not from ignorance, for the undeniable, though confounding truths of revelation have flashed full upon them: but from a wish still, if they only could, to persuade themselves and others, (for who could like to stand alone in his opinion on subjects of such momentous import) that there is no God to punish after death the crimes, of which they feel themselves guilty. *Dixit insipiens in corde suo, non est Deus.* The fool said in his heart, that is, in his wishings, not reasoning faculty, *non est Deus*, there is no God: or that the soul is such after its separation from the body, as to preclude the possibility of its being subjected to pain. It is a fatal truth confirmed by experience, that what we earnestly wish we are easily led to believe; and the more we bring to be of the same way of thinking with ourselves, the more we are encouraged and confirmed in our error. But whatever may have been the internal conviction of those, who could broach such enormities, that of many of their followers may be a thorough conviction. We shall therefore add a few observations on these two heads, with the view of helping to undeceive them.

Every thing that is, if not eternal, must have had a cause capable of producing it. But it is evidently absurd to suppose that matter, or any thing, could have produced itself; for, to produce itself, it must exist before it exists; which, I need not ob-

serve, is the height of absurdity. Besides, matter being by its nature passive and inert, could never of itself, and without the operation of some external agent, have been brought to assume any regular, fixed, and determined motion, color, or form. But is it then eternal? And shall we give to it an attribute, which can belong only to that supreme intelligence, which moulds and directs it at pleasure: to which it is subject in all its parts; and consequently in its great universal whole; but with which it is repugnant to suppose it endowed in any of its portions, or in its vast totality. Does not reason then, and nature compel us to ascribe this attribute to a distinct and more excellent principle, which is seen and felt by common sense to exist apart and uncombined, save in its operations; nay uncombined in any degree with matter in all its possible forms. I perceive this intelligence in every modification of matter; and can plainly read its design. Who sees it not displayed in every object of nature, where every thing is regulated with order, weight and measure; and best adapted for its own particular end? I can perceive it in the least as well as in the greatest objects: in the figure and progress of a snail, as well as in the brightness, immensity, and velocity, of the celestial orbs. It is visible even in the wing of the smallest insect, where, besides the delicate texture & wonderful mechanism; we cannot help admiring its nice proportion to the body it suspends. I see it carefully clothing, according to the temperature of the climates in which they are intended to reside, the various animals, who cannot make coverings for themselves, and either arming them with the fittest weapons for their defence; or affording them sufficient swiftness & sagacity to elude their pursuers and secure their retreat. The same is observable in the inhabitants of the deep; and every creature in all this vast universe is found fitly furnished with every thing best adapted to its line of life in its own nature element.

Need I mention the equal wisdom and design displayed in the inanimate part of the creation? The reproduction of the seed and roots in the vegetative kingdom? The formation of the leaves, flowers and fruit? The wonderful care and skill with which the precious principle of reproduction, the seed, is folded up, each in its own distinct envelope, and securely fenced against the destructive influence of the wintry cold, till the genial season return? It were an endless, but a needless task, to enumerate every thing, in which the skill and wise design of the Supreme intelligence evidently appears. And is all this the scheme and effect of