

THE EVOLUTION OF THE IDEA OF GOD.

CHAPTER I.

CHRISTIANITY AS A RELIGIOUS STANDARD.

I PROPOSE in this work to trace out in rough outline the evolution of the idea of God from its earliest and crudest beginnings in the savage mind of primitive man to that highly evolved and abstract form which it finally assumes in contemporary philosophical and theological thinking.

In the eyes of the modern evolutionary enquirer the interest of the origin and history of this widespread idea is mainly psychological. We have before us a vast and pervasive group of human opinions, true or false, which have exercised and still exercise an immense influence upon the development of mankind and of civilisation : the question arises, Why did human beings ever come to hold these opinions at all, and how did they arrive at them ? What was there in the conditions of early man which led him to frame to himself such abstract notions of one or more great supernatural agents, of whose objective existence he had certainly in nature no clear or obvious evidence ? Regarding the problem in this light, as essentially a problem of the processes of the human mind, I set aside from the outset, as foreign to my purpose, any kind of enquiry into the objective validity of any one among the religious beliefs thus set