

necessary; and hence they considered the world eternal. In the opinion of Epicurus, God was entirely separated from matter, which consisted of innumerable atoms, floating about from eternity, like dust in the air, until at last they assumed the present form of the world.

In modern times, the belief in the eternity of matter has usually been connected with, or made the basis of, a refined and popular system of atheism. I refer to the pantheism of Spinoza. He maintains that there exists in the universe but one substance, variously modified, whose two principal attributes are infinite extension and infinite intelligence. This substance, the *τὸ πᾶν* of Spinoza, he regarded as God; and hence his system is called *Pantheism*. Under various modifications, it has been adopted by many sceptical minds, and is, undoubtedly, the most common and plausible system of atheism extant. Other modern writers, among whom may be mentioned that anomalous philosopher Bayle, have advocated the views of the ancients respecting the eternity of matter.

It may seem strange, but it is true, that some Christian philosophers and divines have been, in ancient and modern times, the advocates of the eternity of matter. The ancient Christians adopted it from Plato. Thus we find Justin Martyr maintaining that God formed the world from an eternal, unorganized material. And the schoolmen, who followed Aristotle, taught that "God had created the world from eternity." On this ground, even some Protestant theologians have asserted that it was absurd to speak of an eternal God who is not an eternal Creator.

A principle which has thus been adopted by so many acute minds unenlightened by revelation, and by some who possessed that divine testimony, must be sustained by some plausible arguments. The principal one relied on is, that the changes which are going on in the material world are proved to be only transmutations, which follow one another in series that return into themselves, and which may, therefore, have been going on from eternity; and if this be admitted, it is as easy to suppose matter to be self-sustained, and to have fallen into its present order of itself, as to suppose the interference of an infinite Spirit. "How do we know," says Dr. Chalmers, in stating the atheistic argument, "that the world is a consequent at all? Is there any greater absurdity in supposing it to have existed,