

Cherbury, Algernon Sidney, and Dr. Channing, of all the better Deists, of the Unitarians too, and the Socinians of modern times,—belong to this highly rational but unpopular and totally inefficient class. The God of these religions is a mere abstract idea; an incomprehensible essence of goodness, power, and wisdom. The understanding cannot conceive of him, except as a great First Cause,—as the incomprehensible source and originator of all things; and it is surely according to reason that he should be thus removed from that lower sphere of conception which even finite intelligences can occupy to the full. But in thus rendering him intangible to the understanding he is rendered intangible to the affections also. Who ever loved an abstract idea? or what sympathy can exist between human minds and an intelligent essence infinitely diffused? And hence the cold and barren inefficiency of artificial religions. They want the vitality of life. They want the grand principle of *motive*; for they can lay no hold on those affections to which this prime mover in all human affairs can alone address itself. They may look well in a discourse or an essay, for, like all human inventions, they may be easily understood and rationally defended; but they are totally unsuited to the nature and the wants of man.

The natural religions are of an entirely different character. They are wild and extravagant; and the enlightened reason, when unbiassed by the influences of early prejudice, rejects them as monstrous and profane. But, unlike the others, they have a strong hold on human nature, and exert a powerful control over its hopes and its fears. Men may build up an artificial religion as they build up a house, and the same age may see it begun and completed. Natural religions, on the contrary, are, like the oak and the chestnut, the slow growth of centuries;