

LECTURE IX.

HISTORY OF PANTHEISM.

PANTHEISM is a word of very wide and very vague import. It has been used to designate an immense variety of systems which have prevailed in the East and the West in ancient and modern times. It is, in fact, a word so vague that few thinkers have defined it to their own satisfaction. There is no general agreement as to its meaning, and it has been applied to all sorts of doctrines, the worst and the best. It has been so understood as to include the lowest atheism and the highest theism—the materialism of Holbach and Büchner, and the spiritualism of St Paul and St John. There is a materialistic pantheism which cannot be rigidly separated from other materialism, and there has been much talk of late of a Christian pantheism which can only be distinguished from Christian theism if theism be identified, or rather confounded, with deism. The term pantheism ought, of course,

to be so understood, if possible, as to be altogether inapplicable to either atheistic or theistic systems ; but we must remember that systems of thought, and especially systems of religion, are seldom, if ever, perfectly homogeneous and self-consistent. It is seldom, if ever, possible to refer them to a class with absolute accuracy, or to find that a definition exactly suits them. Even in regard to materialism, I had to remark that the only kind of system of which its history supplies no record is one which would answer truly to the name of materialism. In the same way there is probably no pure pantheism. The systems designated pantheistic are only more or less so ; they contain likewise, in almost every instance, some atheistic, polytheistic, or theistic elements. It would be therefore unfair to judge any system solely and rigidly by a definition of pantheism. Each pantheistic system must be judged of in itself and as a whole in order to be impartially estimated. Why each system has come to be what it is, and why one system differs from another, are questions which the history of religious philosophy professes to answer, and which it is continually learning to answer in a more thorough and satisfactory manner, while the characteristic at once common to all the systems, and distinctive of them, is still not very clearly or exactly determined.

What is pantheism ? The following is as definite

a general answer as I can give. Pantheism is the theory which regards all finite things as merely aspects, modifications, or parts of one eternal and self-existent being; which views all material objects, and all particular minds, as necessarily derived from a single infinite substance. The one absolute substance—the one all-comprehensive being—it calls God. Thus God, according to it, is all that is; and nothing is which is not essentially included in, or which has not been necessarily evolved out of, God. It may conceive of the one substance in many and most dissimilar ways, but it is only pantheism on condition of conceiving of it as one. For example, there can only be materialistic pantheism where there is believed to be materialistic monism. Its adherents are those who regard matter as ultimately not an aggregate of atoms but a unity,—who are so devoid of perspicacity as not to see that materialism and monism are in reality contradictory conceptions. Pantheism may also represent the derivation of the multiplicity of phenomena from the unity of substance as taking place in many very different ways, but it cannot be truly pantheism unless it represent it as a necessary derivation. It must regard it not as a freely willed production, but as an eternal process which could not have been other than what it has been. In order that there may be pantheism, monism and determinism must be combined. It is only then

that the All of Nature is believed to be coextensive with God—only then that the Divine Being is supposed to be fully or exhaustively expressed in the Divine manifestations.

According to the view I have just stated, no system which does not include determinism and exclude freedom is truly pantheistic. I refuse to have any controversy with certain so-called forms of pantheism which I do not regard as properly pantheistic, and which are certainly not anti-theistic. If matter could be resolved into force, and force could be reasonably inferred to be a phase or exertion of Divine power—if the laws of matter could be shown to be modes of God's agency, and the properties of matter modes of His manifestation—if Berkleyanism could be proved true,—some persons would say that, so far as the physical universe was concerned, pantheism had been established. I should say nothing of the kind, and should consider such an application of the term pantheism as not only unwarranted but injudicious, because unnecessarily provocative of religious prejudice. Physical nature is not represented by the view to which I refer as in the least degree more commensurate with the Divine power than by the common view. It may have been the free production of a volition, and may be an inexpressibly less adequate measure of the might of God, than a thought or word is of the power of man. It may

have left in God an infinite energy which He can direct and apply according to the good pleasure of His will. In like manner, if all human minds were proved to exist—as some have supposed them to do—through the conditions of intelligence called primary ideas; and if these primary ideas could be ascertained to be—what some hold that they are—thoughts of God, not only present in the mind of man, but constituting it what it is,—although Divine thought would thereby be represented as the substance, so to speak, of human minds, yet if a distinct individuality and real freedom could be justly attributed to these minds, pantheism in the strict and proper sense would not be established. The creature is so dependent on the Creator as to exist only in, through, and by Him. What amount of being it has in itself no man can tell. The quantity of being, the degree of being, possessed by the creature is certainly indeterminate. The finite cannot weigh itself in the balances of substance or being with the Infinite. It cannot ascertain what measure of being, what amount of substance, it has, as distinguished from the Infinite. Nor is it necessary that it should try to do so in order to preserve itself from pantheism and its errors. It will be sufficient for this purpose that it adhere to the plain testimony of consciousness and conscience, to the great facts of freedom and responsibility. In knowing ourselves as self-conscious and

self-acting with a certainty far greater than any reasoning to the contrary can produce, we have a guarantee that the pantheism which includes fatalism is false,—and there is, properly speaking, no other pantheism.

Pantheism is, as regards the relation of God to the world, the opposite extreme to what apologetic writers call deism. The latter theory represents God as a personal Being who exists only above and apart from the world, and the world as a something which, although created by God, is now independent of Him, and capable of sustaining and developing itself and performing its work, without His aid, in virtue of its own inherent energies. It not only distinguishes God from the world, but separates and excludes Him from the world. Pantheism, on the contrary, denies that God and nature either do or can exist apart. It regards God without nature as a cause without effect or a substance without qualities, and nature without God as an effect without a cause or qualities without a substance. It sees in the former an abstract conception of a power without efficiency—and in the latter, of a shadow which is cast by no reality. It therefore represents God and nature as eternally and necessarily coexistent, as the indissoluble phases of an absolute unity, as but the inner and outer side of the same whole, as but one existence under a double aspect. Theism takes

an intermediate view. It maintains with deism that God is a personal Being, who created the world intelligently and freely, and is above it and independent of it; but it maintains also with pantheism that He is everywhere present and active in the world, "upholding all things by the word of His power," and so inspiring and working in them that "in Him they live, and move, and have their being." It contradicts deism in so far as that system represents the universe as independent of God, and pantheism in so far as it represents God as dependent on the universe. It excludes what is erroneous and retains what is correct in both deism and pantheism. It is thus at once the pure truth and the whole truth.

Pantheism has appeared in a far greater variety of phases, and has presented a far richer combination of elements, than materialism. It has always endeavoured to comprehend and harmonise aspirations and facts, ideas and realities, the infinite and the finite. It has tried all methods of investigation and exposition, and has assumed a multitude of forms. It has had great constructive skill displayed on it, and has been adorned with all sorts of beauties. But just because its history is far broader and richer than that of materialism, it is also one which it is far more difficult worthily to delineate. It is not much to be wondered at that there should be no adequate history of pantheism.

I cannot attempt to trace even the general course of that history, and yet I cannot wholly ignore the subject, seeing that pantheism can only be understood through the study of its actual development. Nothing can be more delusive than an estimate of pantheism based exclusively on a definition or general description.¹

I.

It is an error to regard India as the sole fountain-head of pantheism. Wherever we find traces of speculation on the origin of things, there we also find traces of pantheism. But nowhere was the soil so congenial to it as in India, and nowhere else has it flourished so luxuriantly. It has overspread the whole land — overgrown the whole Hindu mind and life. The pantheism of India, however, has always been to some extent combined or associated with theism. There are hymns in the Rig-Veda, relative to creation, which are distinctly more monotheistic than pantheistic. In many passages of the Upanishads, the national epics, and the philosophical sūtras and commentaries, the Universal Soul is certainly not described as strictly impersonal. But theism in India was never either strong or pure, and has never been

¹ See Appendix XXXIV.

able even to hold its own against the deeply and firmly rooted pantheism of the land.

The literature of India shows us the successive stages through which its religion has passed. The earliest is that disclosed to us in the oldest Vedic hymns. It was a phase of religious naturalism. The objects and aspects of the universe, and especially light and its manifestations, assumed in the imaginations and feelings of the primitive Aryan settlers in India a divine character. The bright sky, the sun, the dawn, the fire, the winds, the clouds, were deemed by them to be instinct with life, thought, and affection—beings to whom prayers and sacrifices ought to be offered—agents at once physical and divine. With such deities, however, the mind could not long rest in a progressive society. They were too vague and indeterminate; they wanted character and individuality. The intellect, the imagination, the heart, craved for more definite personalities, and gradually developed naturalism into, or replaced it by, anthropomorphism. Elemental deities yielded to human deities. The two states indicated are, however, merely stages of a single process. The naturalism by no means wholly excluded the attributing of human qualities to the deified natural powers, and the anthropomorphism absorbed into itself much of the naturalism out of which it had grown. It would also seem that a certain con-

sciousness of an ultimate unity underlying the worshipped powers and persons—of a common Divine source, of which they were the issues and expressions—was never entirely extruded or extinguished by the polytheism of either of these two stages. It was in greatest danger, perhaps, of being lost under the latter, when imagination was actively creating anthropomorphic deities; but even then the craving of mind and heart after unity was seen in the exaltation of some one of the gods to supremacy. This led, however, only to self-contradiction and confusion; now one god, and now another—now Varuna, now Indra, now Agni—being represented and revered as the highest, or even the absolute, deity. With the rise and predominance of a cultured, thoughtful, speculative class, the priestly class, a more elevated, abstract, and comprehensive unity was conceived of—Brahma. The idea of Brahma is that of a being indefinable in itself, but perceptible in its forms, the substantial reality of all that exists, the universal life in which the world is absorbed and from which it issues. This idea was the natural result of the whole course of religious thought represented in the Vedas, although in the Vedas it is only found in a quite rudimentary condition. All subsequent Hindu speculation, however, contributed either directly or indirectly to evolve it. To explain in detail how and why, would be to write the longest

and most important chapter in the history of Hindu civilisation. In what we may call the straight line of development lie the works which may be regarded as the sources and authorities of the philosophy which is generally admitted to have most fully deduced the conclusions implied in the Vedas, and which is undoubtedly the completest expression of Hindu pantheism—the Vedanta philosophy. The chief stages of the growth of this philosophy out of its Vedic germ, can be traced by the help of the literary documents with considerable certainty; but I can, of course, merely indicate the general character of its doctrine.

The central idea in the Vedanta theory is, that there is only one real being, and that this being is absolutely one. All material things and finite minds are conceived of as but emanations from the sole entity, and all that seems to imply independent existence is referred to ignorance. The whole of science is comprised, according to Vedantism, in the one formula—"Brahma alone exists; everything else is illusion." The truth of this formula is held to be implied in the very idea of Brahma, as the one eternal, unlimited, pure, and perfect being. If there existed a multitude of realities which had an origin and an end, which were finite, compounded, and imperfect, they must have originated in Brahma. But this they could not have done, it is argued, unless Brahma had

within himself the real principle of multiplicity, limitation; or, in other words, unless he were really not one, not eternal, not perfect. To ascribe real being and individuality to anything but Brahma, is equivalent to denying that Brahma is Brahma. Nor can there be any qualities and distinctions in Brahma. The absolute unity must be at once absolute reality and absolute knowledge. Were absolute being and absolute knowing not identical, there could be no absolute identity, no being absolutely one. Brahma, the universal soul, is the absolute knowledge which is inclusive of, and self-identical with, reality. But absolute knowledge cannot be the knowledge of anything, for this implies the distinction of subject and object, which is of itself a limitation both of subject and object. Absolute knowledge must exclude the dualism of subject and object, and every kind of synthesis and relation.

Thus argues the Vedantist. What are we to think of his argument? Merely that it is logically valid. It deduces correctly a false conclusion from a false principle. He who will hold to the belief in an absolute abstract unity must necessarily identify knowing and being, and deny that pure knowing admits of a distinction between subject and object. But such a unity as this cannot be reasonably entertained by the mind. To ask reason to start from it, is to ask it to

start with a contradiction of its own fundamental laws. Besides, no kind of multiplicity or diversity can ever be shown to be consistent with such unity. The existence in some sense, however, of a multitude of different things, cannot be denied and must be accounted for. We perceive a variety of separate finite objects and are conscious of imperfection and limitation in ourselves. We do not perceive an infinite unity which is neither subject nor object, and which is perfect and unlimited, nor are we conscious of identity with it. How are we to explain this on the Vedantist hypothesis? How are we to reconcile the reason which denies with the consciousness which affirms distinctions and limitations? How are we to connect the one and the many, the absolute and the relative?

The hypothesis of emanation may be had recourse to, but it is obviously insufficient. Emanation is a physical process, and only possible because matter is essentially multiple and divisible. The fire sends forth sparks just because it is no unity but a multitude—an aggregate. The sparks are not identical either with one another or with the fire; they and all other parts of the fire are distinct from one another, although all the parts are of the same sort. The notion of emanation and the notion of absolute unity are exclusive of each other. The Vedantists saw this, and confessed that all the similes which they made use

of drawn from instances of emanation in physical nature were radically defective. They claimed no more for them than that they might help intelligence in what they described as its dream-state, to believe that nothing exists except Brahma. In other words, they admitted that these similes were addressed, not to the reason, but to the imagination. Hence it was necessary for them to supplement the hypothesis of emanation by another—that of illusion caused by ignorance.

The problem which they had to solve was to reconcile their theory of only one being with their consciousness of many beings. It was a problem which they could not solve, but they so far concealed their failure to solve it by making, as Dr Ballantyne has said, "the fact itself do duty for its own cause." The soul does not know that God alone is, and that finite souls and finite things are not, because it does not know it—because it is ignorant. Were it not for ignorance the worlds of sense and consciousness would not appear—God alone would be. It is ignorance which has made the appearances that we call worlds and souls, and these appearances are mere illusions—deceits. They are *māyā*. It is impossible, of course, to find any satisfaction in such an hypothesis. Who is it that Brahma is deceiving? Himself. Why should he do that? And how can he do it? Ignorance and illusion are im-

plied in our consciousness of the world and of self being false, but they are not implied in, nor even consistent with, its being true that there is no being save one absolute and perfect being. The latter supposition precludes the possibility of ignorance, appearance, illusion, &c. The Vedantists, however, could not dispense with ignorance and illusion. It was only thus that they could seem to adhere to their absolute unity. It was only in the state of illusion that they could think of Brahma, and only with the help even of very material imagery that they could speak of him.

I might now proceed to explain the Vedanta theory of the three qualities of ignorance, which, separately or in combination, obscure the knowledge which constitutes the essence of the soul; and of its two powers, the one originating belief in our consciousness of personality, and the other accounting for the dream that there is an external world. I might also dwell on the Vedanta theory of the nature and laws of the evolution of phenomena. The transformations of Brahma, of which the evolution consists, are supposed to take place according to both a diminishing and an increasing progression, the former being from more to less perfect, and the latter from less to more definite. I am compelled, however, to leave unconsidered these and other portions of the system, and must

content myself with merely stating that the theory of human life and destiny, based on the view of God and nature which has been delineated, is just that which we should have anticipated. The end of man is regarded as the perfect repose which must result from union with the absolute. It is held to be only attainable through the science which is comprised in the formula — “one only without a second.” The way to reach true science is maintained to be meditation on Revelation, with renunciation of the world and pious dispositions and exercises. The effects of it are described as freedom from ignorance, error, the possibility of sin, desire, activity, transmigration, and change. Whoever knows Brahma becomes Brahma. He is freed from the illusion that he has any distinct personal existence. He shakes off pleasure and pain, virtue and vice, all distinctions and qualities. He returns into the essence whence he came, and attains the highest identity. In a word, from the pantheism of the Vedanta philosophy, all its chief consequences are deduced with a boldness and consistency which justify its claim to be regarded as among the greatest systems to which speculation has given birth.

In the pantheism of the Vedanta doctrine the finite is lost in the infinite. Along with the affirmation of an impersonal God there is the negation of the reality of the worlds, both of sense and con-

sciousness. In other words, the issue of this kind of pantheism is acosmism. But pantheism is just as likely to issue in atheism. Those who are determined to reach an absolute unity, while yet feeling constrained to admit that physical objects and finite minds have a veritable existence, must sacrifice the infinite to the finite—God to nature,—must represent God as an abstraction and nullity. From this virtual atheism there is but a step to avowed atheism. The Sankhya philosophy and Buddhism are the Hindu exemplifications of this tendency of pantheistic speculation.¹

From India let us pass on to Greece. In India philosophy as a rule rests on the Vedas. Its systems are classed as orthodox or heterodox. Hence Hegel has aptly compared the Hindu to the scholastic systems, as being systems of philosophy within systems of theology. Even the Sankhya system, which can hardly be said to acknowledge the authority of the Vedas, and which is really atheistical in character, yet proposes to itself for final aim a religious end, the securing of salvation to man, and recommends the pursuit of truth only as a means to that end. In Greece it was otherwise. Philosophy there had from the first a sort of consciousness of a function of its own. It invoked no anterior or supernatural authority. The influence of religion upon it was real and

¹ See Appendix XXXV.

considerable, but indirect and secondary. It was content to trust entirely in reason, and to aim at nothing beyond truth.

All the pre-Socratic schools of Greek philosophy, with the exception of that of Democritus, were more or less pantheistic; but only in the Eleatic philosophy does early Greek pantheism appear fully developed. It bears a most striking resemblance to the Vedanta theory. Almost all that is needed to convert Vedanta doctrine into Eleatic doctrine is to substitute the word Being for the word Brahma. The more closely I have examined and compared the two systems, the more I have been impressed with this truth; and yet there can be no doubt that the one system was as thoroughly Greek as the other was thoroughly Hindu.

The Eleatic philosophy was founded by Xenophanes, and brought to perfection by Parmenides. I shall state very briefly its leading principles as taught by the latter. His cardinal principle is the opposition of being and appearance, truth and opinion, reason and sense. To being corresponds reason; to appearance, sense. Reason apprehending being is truth; sense apprehending appearance is opinion. Being and appearance, reason and sense, truth and opinion, are essentially irreconcilable and contradictory. All truth belongs to reason, which alone can apprehend being. There

is no truth in sense; and the credit which men attach to its testimony is merely a proof of their tendency to follow "the road of appearance, where nought but fallacy reigneth." Parmenides had the courage to challenge the authority of external impressions, and of all reasoning from them, and distinctly to deny that material things exist as we see them, or need exist at all because we believe that we see them. So far as the senses and their objects were concerned, he was an avowed sceptic. His scepticism, however, was a means, and not an end. He denied, and laboured to destroy, the authority of sense, but only in order to affirm and establish the authority of reason. He desired that reason should rule without a rival. His philosophy was, therefore, essentially not scepticism, but dogmatic idealism. It rested on reason alone, and on reason understood in the strictest, narrowest, most exclusive manner—on reason reduced to a single idea, and expressed in a single truth.

What was the truth which he regarded as the one truth, the whole truth? It was this: "Being is, and cannot but be; not-being is not, and cannot be. One can affirm everything of being, and nothing of not-being." He started where his predecessor, Xenophanes, ended. Xenophanes passed from the thought of God to the thought of absolute being; Parmenides began with absolute being. He was quite aware of the sort of contradiction

involved in saying at one and the same time, "not-being is not, and cannot be," and "one can affirm nothing of not-being." He felt that he had to speak so because the very notion of not-being is a contradiction, and all speech about it must be a contradiction. "One can neither know not-being," he said, "nor express it in words: for it has in it no possibility of being." His not-being did not mean non-existence, but all that sense and ordinary thought apprehend as existence; it included earth, air, ocean, and the minds of men. The whole multiple and divisible universe was what he held to be the not-being, which is to reason a contradiction so great that it is impossible even to speak of it in a rational manner. His "what is not is not" was not a truism, but a paradox.

In deducing a doctrine of being, Parmenides displayed great speculative boldness and ability. I can merely state the results at which he arrived. 1°, Being, he argued, is absolutely one. It is not an abstract unity, but the only reality. It so is that it alone is. 2°, Being, he further affirmed, is continuous and indivisible; it is everywhere like to itself, and everywhere alike present. Were there parts in being there would be plurality, and being would not be one—that is, would not be being. There can be no differences or distinctions in being; for what is different and distinct from being must be not-being, and not-being is not.

3°, Being, he also maintained, is incapable of change or motion in space. It cannot exist either in a state of rest or movement analogous to the rest and movement of the material world. We conceive of bodies only as in space, and of their changes only as changes of their parts relative to different points of space; but absolute being has no parts with relations to the different points of what is called space. Bodies and their parts, space and its points, are mere appearances, with which true being has nothing in common. 4°, Being, he further argued, is immobile in time. It can have neither birth nor destruction, past nor future. 5°, Being was affirmed by him to be perfect—itself alone an end or limit to itself. 6°, Being, he likewise held—anticipating Hegel as he had anticipated Kant—is identical with thought. It could not otherwise be absolutely one. “Thought,” he said, “is the same thing as being. Thought must be being; for being exists, and non-being is nothing.” And again, “But thought is identical with its object; for without being, on which it rests, you will not find thought—nothing, in fact, is or will be distinct from being.”

Parmenides, you will perceive, was not a man easily daunted. Pantheism has rarely been more consistent and complete than it was in his hands. The world was as entirely lost in his Being as in the Vedantist Brahma. But as in India, so in Greece, there was a pantheism of a contrary kind—one in

which unity was virtually lost in multiplicity, the absolute in the phenomenal. Perhaps the Heraclitean doctrine was the best example presented by the history of Greek philosophy of a pantheism of this kind. Heraclitus, having sought in vain for any permanent principle, for any absolute being, was led to maintain that the universe is merely a process of incessant change; that its essence is not being, but becoming; that fire pervaded by intelligence is its universal ground and fittest symbol; and that the human mind is a portion of the all-pervasive mind, and can only attain truth through communion with it.

With Socrates and Plato the course of speculation took, on the whole, a theistic direction. In Aristotle it tended rather towards pantheism. Stoicism was originally and predominantly a materialistic or hylozoic form of pantheism; but some of its greatest representatives conceived of God in a decidedly theistic manner as the supreme moral reason. In stoicism everything was subordinated to morality, and only its ethics was sublime. Its theology was crude and confused, and I pass over it without regret.¹

II.

Christianity did not arrest the progress of pantheism as it did that of materialism. On the

¹ See Appendix XXXVI.

contrary, it seemed to stimulate and increase its activity. In the second, third, fourth, and fifth centuries of our era there was a vast amount of pantheistic speculation influenced by and influencing Christianity, sometimes directly opposing it, sometimes endeavouring to incorporate its doctrines and establish them on a philosophical basis, and sometimes claiming to be identical with it and entitled to its authority. I need only remind you of the Gnostic systems, and of the Neo-Platonic philosophy of Alexandria. When Gnosticism and Neo-Platonism seemed to be vanquished and destroyed, they were, in reality, merely transformed. They entered into Judaism with the Cabbala, and into Christianity with the writings of the so-called Dionysius the Areopagite. On the threshold of the middle ages a very remarkable man—John Scott Erigena—made a most vigorous and elaborate attempt to reconcile and combine a pantheistic philosophy and the doctrine of the Christian Church, on the assumption that philosophy and religion are substantially one—philosophy veiled in the form of tradition being religion, and religion unveiled from the form of tradition by reason being philosophy. He explained Scripture as the symbolic self-manifestation of the absolute, and gave ingenious speculative expositions of the Trinity, the creation of the world and of man, the incarnation of the Logos, &c., according to prin-

ciples derived from Plotinus and Proclus, Origen and Maximus the Confessor, and especially the pseudo-Dionysius. The latest English historian of pantheism tells us that there was little or no pantheism in the middle ages. This is about as accurate as it would be to say that there are no Methodists at present in England or Ultramontanists in France. Pantheism was prevalent all through the middle ages; and medieval pantheism, unlike modern pantheism, was not confined to speculative individuals, but was adopted by considerable communities—the Beghards and Beguines, the Brothers and Sisters of the Free Spirit, the Turlupins, the Adamites, the Familists, the Spiritual Libertines, &c. This popular pantheism was partly due to the persistence of the ancient pagan spirit among the uneducated masses, and partly to reaction from the externality and formalism which characterised medieval Christianity. It died away before the light of the Reformation, owing to Protestantism giving to the religious instincts of the people a satisfaction which Romanism denied to them.

In the year 1600 the brilliant inaugurator of modern pantheism, Jordano Bruno, was burned at Rome. His bold, teeming, imaginative mind, susceptible to the most varied influences, originated a grandiose system, rich in its elements and vast in its scope, but devoid of self-consistency,

method, and proof. It combined without harmonising the Eleatic, Neo-Platonic, and naturalistic pantheisms; naturalism being perhaps predominant, owing to the powerful hold which the discoveries of Copernicus, and the idea of an infinity of worlds, had taken of the author's mind. Bruno was the precursor of Spinoza, by whom his writings were carefully studied.¹

Baruch Spinoza (1632-77) is the most celebrated of all pantheists, and I must delineate as distinctly as I can within the narrow limits to which I am confined his theory of God, and of the relation of God to the universe. It is a theory which was drawn from a multitude of sources—the Talmud, the Cabbala, Maimonides, Ben Gerson, Chasdai Creskas, Bruno, Descartes, &c.—which was slowly and gradually developed, and which passed through various phases in its author's mind before it was elaborated into the shape which it assumed in the last and greatest of his works, the 'Ethica.' It is in its final form that we must look at it.

Thinking philosophy ought to be purely deductive—ought to start from a single point fixed by the necessities of reason, and be carried on by sheer force of logic in the form of a continuous demonstration to all its consequences—Spinoza very naturally, and had his supposition been cor-

¹ See Appendix XXXVII.

rect, very justly, imagined that the order of knowledge must be the same as the order of existence. What is first in reality must, he thought, be first in science. So he began with God, the first, the self-existent Being. This, however, cannot but be a stumbling-block to all who believe that the inductive process is that of philosophy, or even that philosophy has to take account of the results of the inductive sciences. In all inductive science, principles which are first in the order of nature are last in the order of intelligence. It is only in mathematical science that first principles are first in the order both of nature and intelligence. All, therefore, who cannot admit that philosophy is mathematical or demonstrative science—who acknowledge that unity is her goal or aim, but deny that it is her starting-point—will feel that Spinoza has begun at the wrong end, however natural it may have been for him to begin at that end.

His doctrine of the Divine nature is unfolded in a series of thirty-seven propositions, all professedly demonstrated, and many of them having corollaries and scholia. This series of propositions is prefaced by eight definitions and seven axioms. Most of the axioms look very innocent, but they are not as innocent as they look. There seems to be no danger in assenting to such an affirmation as "All that is, is either in itself, or in some thing other than itself," which is axiom first; but danger

there is ; and you will find this axiom used under proposition sixth to prove that there is nothing in the universe but substance and the affections of substance ; under proposition fifteenth, to prove that thought and extension are either attributes of God, or modes of His attributes ; and so in many other places, precisely as if there was only one way of being *in* a thing, or as if *in* denoted a particular kind of inherence. It seems quite safe to assent to a statement like this, "Whatever can be thought of as non-existing does not in its essence involve existence," but no ; it is true only if it is the truism, Whatever can be thought of as non-existing need not be thought of as existing ; whereas it is not so understood, but in application is made to do duty for the very different affirmation, What can be conceived of as existing in its essence involves existence, so as to conceal in some measure one great failure of the system—its inability to establish that the notions it deals with answer to what really exists.

The definitions, unlike the axioms, present difficulties which almost every one who reads them in some measure feels. Spinoza had given them many an altering touch to bring them into the form which they bear in the Ethics, as he always found that, although they seemed to him the simplest and most self-evident truths, his friends felt it difficult to accept, or even to under-

stand them. I have no time to examine these definitions of "cause of itself," "the finite in its kind," "substance," "attribute," "mode," "God," "free and necessary," "eternity;" but I must enter my decided protest against the opinion expressed by Mr Lewes and others, that no criticism of them is needed, since they are definitions of terms. "They need not," says Mr Lewes, "long be dwelt on, although frequently referred to by Spinoza; above all, no objection ought to be raised against them as unusual or untrue, for they are the meanings of various terms in constant use with Spinoza, and he has a right to use them as he pleases, provided he does not afterwards depart from this use, which he is careful not to do." Well, no doubt Spinoza had so far a right to define the terms he intended to use as he pleased, on condition of keeping strictly to his definitions, but he may also have abused his right. Euclid might have called the circle a square and the square a circle, might have interchanged the names of line and surface and solid, yet defined them all correctly, and reasoned on them all correctly; but it would have been a very unwise thing in him to have thus severed and opposed the popular and scientific use of these terms, and would have led to much confusion even in mathematics. Now Spinoza has done something not very different from this in his definitions of "substance," "mode," "free

and necessary," and "eternity." Further, if we may not object to a man's definitions of terms as unusual or untrue, we certainly may object to them if obscure, if ambiguous, if self-contradictory, if definitions of the inherently absurd. If Euclid's definition of a circle, for example, had been difficult to understand, or if it had been as true of a square as of a circle, or if he had offered us a definition of a square circle, or of parallel lines that meet, we should have had abundance of reason to object. And obscurity, ambiguity, self-contradiction, are just the charges which will be brought against such definitions as those which Spinoza gives of "cause of itself" and "substance." As to the statement that he was careful not to depart from that use of his terms which he prescribed to himself by his definitions, I have no doubt that he was careful—that he did his best—being thoroughly honest and sincere, anxious to deceive no one, anxious not to deceive himself; but I have as little doubt that with all his care he was not successful, and that his use of terms was often inconsistent with his definitions, or consistent only through the ambiguity of the definitions. Nor could he help himself. A man who reasoned in geometry from definitions of square circles and parallel lines that meet, would find it impossible to be consistent in his use of terms; scarcely more possible was a consistent use of them to one who

started, like Spinoza, with definitions of "cause of itself" and "substance in itself."

His central definition is that of God: "God is a being absolutely infinite; in other words, God is substance, constituted by an infinity of attributes, each of which expresses an eternal and infinite essence." This is presented to us as an intuitive truth, clear and certain in its own self-evidence, as a principle on which we may safely reason to any length, with the conviction of knowing as thoroughly what it means as we know what Euclid means by isosceles, or scalene, or right-angled triangle. In reality, it is far more mysterious than any proposition contained in the creeds of the Church respecting the Trinity or the Incarnation. It is difficult to understand how Spinoza could expect that men would receive as self-evident, on the bare statement of it, such an assertion as that "God is substance constituted by an infinity of attributes;" or how he could overlook that if substance is constituted by attributes it cannot be what he himself defines it to be, "that which is in itself, and is conceived by itself, or that the conception of which does not involve the conception of anything else as that from which it is formed." The definition of God I have called Spinoza's central definition, because it includes, takes up into itself, the other definitions. There occur in it, you will have observed, the words substance, attribute, infinite,

eternal. It includes, therefore, directly, the definitions given of these four words. It includes the word "essence," which should have been defined here, and is defined in part second. It includes the phrase "absolutely infinite," which receives not a definition, but an explanation that amounts to a definition. The only definitions which it does not directly include are those of "cause in itself," "free," and "mode;" but the two former are so defined as to be identical with substance, as to be substance itself in two aspects, and the last as an affection of substance. Directly or indirectly, therefore, the definition of God includes all the other definitions. The consequence is obvious. It is that, directly or indirectly, that definition includes all that is obscure, ambiguous, self-contradictory, in all the definitions. It is a guarantee that whatever there is of this kind in any of these definitions will be worked into the doctrine of the Divine nature, and will corrupt that doctrine.

Spinoza was not fortunate, then, at the commencement of his undertaking. Was he more successful afterwards? Some persons think so. Spinozism has been pronounced "a faultless demonstration." This is far from my opinion. The paralogisms, the fallacies, in Spinoza are, I believe, simply countless, because he started with vague and ambiguous principles and pursued a hopeless course. Had he been less convinced that he was

right, or less able, he would have been stopped at countless points; but the intense and honest conviction of being right could not make him to be right, and no ability could achieve the impossible.

The whole of his doctrine concerning God is in germ in his definition of God. The first great stage in its development is formed by the attempted proof of the identity of the ideas of God and of substance. The notion of substance defined, as has been mentioned, is the foundation of his definition of God, of his entire theological doctrine, of his whole philosophy. A less solid or secure foundation there could not be. Substance in itself, which is what is defined, is simply what no human mind has ever apprehended or can apprehend. Every attempt to define substance in itself, or to reason on it, must be repelled as a violation of the laws of human thought, of the essential limitations of human knowledge. Spinozism is a system founded on this error. Spinoza had the firmest conviction that he had a clear, distinct, and true idea of substance in itself, that he might safely trust his fortunes to it, and that all that he could infer from it by strict logic would be eternal verities, certain as anything in Euclid, far more certain than mere experience and sense. He proceeded accordingly to demonstrate, as he supposed, such propositions concerning it as that substance is prior in nature to its accidents; that two substances having dif-

ferent attributes have nothing in common with each other ; that it is impossible that there should be two or more substances of the same nature or of the same attribute ; that one substance cannot be created by another substance ; that to exist pertains to the nature of substance ; that all substance is necessarily infinite ; that all substance is absolutely infinite ; that this sole and singular substance — this absolutely infinite substance — is God, in whom whatever is is, without whom nothing can be conceived, of whom all that is must be some sort of attributes or modes. Thus he gradually worked out the conclusion that God is the one and all of substance, beyond which there is nothing, and in which all that is has such being as belongs to it.

The second great stage in the development of his doctrine of the Divine nature is the deduction of the attributes of the one absolutely infinite substance. An attribute is defined by him as “ whatever the intellect perceives of substance as constituting the essence of substance.” Substance and attributes are inseparable. Substance has necessarily attributes, each of which expresses in its own way the essence of substance, and is therefore, as that essence is, infinite, although only in its own way. Substance has necessarily even an infinity of attributes, for it is absolutely infinite, and only an infinity of attributes can adequately repre-

sent a nature which is not only infinite but absolutely or infinitely infinite. Out of this infinite number of attributes two only are known to us,—extension and thought. God is conceived as thinking substance when He is apprehended by the mind under the attribute of thought, and as extended substance when He is conceived under the attribute of extension; but thinking substance and extended substance are not two substances distinct from one another, but the one substance apprehended by the mind of man, now under this attribute, now under that. Extension as a Divine attribute is, according to Spinoza, very different from the finite extension which belongs to body: it has no length, bulk, depth, shape, divisibility, or movability, and in referring it to Deity none of these things are referred to Him; it is incapable of being apprehended by sense or imagination; capable only of being apprehended by reason. Divine thought is likewise altogether different from human thought: it is absolute thought—thought which has infinite substance itself for object; which is in no way limited or determined; which is unconditioned by anything like a faculty of understanding; which falls under no law of succession, separation, or plurality.

The doctrine has still another stage. Substance with its attributes is God as the cause or source of the universe. But what is the universe itself?

What are the sun and stars, earth and ocean? What are living things, human bodies and human minds, human experience and human history? They are, Spinoza argues, modes of the attributes of God. Modes express the essence of the attributes as the attributes express the essence of substance. The modes of each attribute are necessarily finite in nature, because an attribute is not a substance, and therefore not infinitely infinite; but they are necessarily infinite in number, because each attribute has a real although particular infinity. Infinite thought must express itself by an infinite number of ideas, and infinite extension by an infinite variety of magnitudes, forms, and motions. These modes constitute and compose the whole world of the senses and the whole world of consciousness. Man himself is but a combination of these modes. His soul is a mode of Divine thought, and his body is a mode of Divine extension.

I think this doctrine must be admitted to be devoid neither of simplicity nor grandeur. It has certainly been constructed with wonderful architectonic skill. God is the one and all. He is the infinitely infinite, the only substance. From this substance necessarily proceeds an infinity of particular attributes. From each attribute necessarily proceeds an infinite number of finite. These modes constitute what is called the universe. There is

nothing which is not necessarily evolved from, and essentially included in, God. Of course this is pantheism. And yet it is very easy to err as to where the pantheism of it lurks, as a few remarks may help to show.

Take the first stage of the doctrine which has been delineated. Many have thought that when Spinoza has reached the conclusion that there is only one substance, and that God is that substance, he has attained the completest possible pantheism. But no; pantheism is still, properly speaking, far distant. For Spinoza includes, it must be remembered, in his definition of substance, as the very essence of what he means by it, the notion of self-existence. We may fairly object that it was injudicious thus to give the word a meaning so unusual; still, of course, we must interpret it as he was pleased to employ it. Do this, however, and manifestly there is no substance but God, for there is no other self-existent being. Everything else, everything in nature, every finite mind, exists only through another than itself, exists only through God—*i.e.*, is not a Spinozistic substance. In like manner, the proposition that one substance cannot be produced by another substance has been represented as equivalent to a denial of the possibility and reality of creation, a denial of the very first words of the Bible,—“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” But again there is

obvious misconception. If God created the heavens and the earth, the heavens and the earth are not self-existent—are not, according to Spinoza, substances. Spinoza does not deny that God produced things, but that He produced things the essences of which involve existence. What he affirms is, that God is not only the cause why things begin to exist, but also why they continue in existence. His language is pantheistic in sound, but had he adhered strictly to his own definitions it would have been quite consistent with theism in signification. Not unnaturally, however, he was the dupe of his own language, and fancied that he disproved the possibility of creation in the ordinary acceptance of the doctrine.

When we pass to his theory of the Divine attributes we find that, under a specious appearance of consistency, it is so incoherent and confused that no definite designation can be appropriately attached to it. We welcome his affirmation that God has an infinity of attributes which are unknown to us, as an admission that God in infinite ways transcends the powers of apprehension possessed by finite minds. But we are compelled to ask, Can there be in a substance which is absolutely one, as conceived of by Spinoza, any attributes which are not relative to minds distinct from that substance? Can there be any attributes objectively in the substance itself? If the answer be

in the negative—be that the attributes of substance exist only for minds, or arise only from the relations of substance to minds—substance is obviously not the absolute and comprehensive unity from which all proceeds, but implies, yea, presupposes the existence of minds which are distinct from it. It becomes impossible to regard it as the primary and universal existence, apart from which nothing is, or as more than a merely secondary and particular object of mind. If the answer be in the affirmative, the notion of substance is none the less displaced and destroyed. The unity of substance disappears, for, as by Spinoza's express declaration, each attribute is essentially distinct from every other, the substance is represented as an aggregation of distinct and irreducible essences. The whole being even of substance disappears, for the attributes must exhaust the substance of which they are the necessary and complete expression. The absolute substance vanishes, and in its place appears an infinite number of unconnected attributes.

Of these attributes Spinoza professed to explain only two—extension and thought. He does so on the ground that these are the only attributes of which the human understanding has any knowledge. Yet the general outcome of his argumentation regarding them is that the human understanding has virtually no knowledge of them.

Because he said that God is extended, some have inferred that he supposed God to be corporeal; but he endeavoured to guard himself against this error by denying to extension everything which characterises body, and ascribing to it a number of peculiarities which body does not possess. As to thought, he maintained that thought in God is of an entirely different nature from thought in man—that the one bears no more resemblance to the other than the dog, a sign in the heavens, does to the dog, an animal which barks. Thus the only two attributes which he admits to be accessible to the human mind he also represents as really inaccessible to it, and utterly unlike the extension or thought of which we have any experience. If the Divine thought have no more resemblance to human thought than the dog-star to the dog that barks, we have no knowledge of the former whatever, and merely deceive ourselves when we call it thought at all. This so-called pantheism, instead of helping us to realise that God is near to us, practically assures us that God as God, as *natura naturans*, is unknowable by us, and, in fact, that there is no God who can be a God for the human mind.

At the third stage of his theory, Spinoza maintains that all finite things are modes of the Divine attributes of the one Divine substance. No language could be more pantheistic as mere language.

But, of course, it must be remembered that by confining the name of substance to the self-existent, self-subsistent, he had condemned himself to the use of pantheistic language, however free of pantheistic taint his thought might have been. He could not call finite things substances; he must deny them to be substances. What could he call them? Once you agree to restrict the term substance to what is absolute and self-existent, it matters comparatively little what name you give to that which is relative and created. If you call it a mode, that means merely that it is derived from and dependent on what is self-existent. Spinoza's language, "all finite things are modes of the one Divine substance," means no more, if strictly interpreted, than that all finite things are derived from, and dependent on, the one self-existent Being. Unfortunately, however, he has made it impossible for us thus to interpret him. His language must be read in the light of the fact that he withholds alike from the substance and the modes—from the self-existent Being and the derivative and dependent existences—freedom of will, true personality. He affirms, indeed, that God is free; but he is careful to explain that by free he really means necessary; that Divine liberty is Divine activity necessarily determined by the Divine nature, although independent of any extraneous cause. He also expressed his belief

in the Divine personality, even when admitting that he could form no clear conception of it, but practically he ignored it in his theory. The result was the sacrifice of all individual lives, of all personal character and action, of all freedom and responsibility, to a dead, unintelligible, fatalistic unity. Spinoza was a man of a singularly pure and noble nature, yet he was compelled by the force of logic to draw from his pantheism immoral and slavish consequences which would speedily ruin any individual or nation that ventured to adopt them.

It would not have been difficult to draw from it atheism itself. That was certainly not what Spinoza taught or meant to teach. What he maintained was, that the Divine existence is the one true existence, and that the whole system of what we call nature exists only through connection with it. He did not say that space, as we understand space, and time, in the sense of duration, and the worlds which are in space and time, and what these worlds contain, are all that there is; on the contrary, he said that, besides these things, there was the whole universe of true being—substance with infinite attributes unknown to us, and with others somewhat known, absolute extension, absolute eternity, absolute thought, absolute activity. None the less did his idea of God involve the

very doctrine to which it seemed to be the contrary extreme. If the absolute substance must express itself necessarily and completely in its attributes, it must be absorbed and exhausted in these attributes; and if they in turn must necessarily and completely evolve into modes, only modes will remain. It may be said that substance, attributes and modes are eternally distinct, although eternally connected; but this cannot be rationally thought or believed if absolute activity be necessary activity. In this case the monism of Spinoza must inevitably disintegrate and dissolve into monadism—his pantheism into atheism or naturalism.¹

I have dwelt at some length on Spinozism from a desire to present one good example of what a pantheistic system is, it being impossible for me in the circumstances to delineate a variety of typical instances. I might have selected my specimen from later times, and discoursed on the pantheism of a Fichte, or Schelling, or Hegel. But I am convinced that this would have been unprofitable. The theories of any of these thinkers can only be intelligently exhibited and fairly criticised in lengthened expositions which permit much explanation and illustration. Good brief summaries of their systems exist in various histories of phil-

¹ See Appendix XXXVIII.

osophy, but I doubt if unprofessional students will be greatly the wiser after the perusal even of the best of them.

So far as the philosophies of Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel were pantheistic in their nature, or had a pantheistic interpretation imposed upon them, they presented only very inadequate and unworthy views of God. He is surely not to be identified with the moral order of the universe, or with an absolute indifference of subject and object which develops itself in reality and ideality, nature and spirit, or with a self-evolving impersonal process which, after having traversed all the spheres of matter and mind, attains a knowledge of its Godhead in the speculative reason of man. These are not rational thoughts but foolish fancies, although there may have been associated with them much that is true, suggestive, and profound. It was natural, therefore, that the idealistic pantheism attributed to the philosophers just named should have very soon almost disappeared even in Germany itself. It was like a fountain of mingled sweet and bitter waters which had scarcely emerged into the light of day before they parted into two distinct streams, the one being that which is known as speculative theism, and the other bearing various names, but always presenting some phase of naturalistic or humanitarian atheism. Pantheism is always in unstable equilibrium be-

tween theism and atheism, and is logically necessitated to elevate itself to the one or to descend to the other.¹

When idealism is followed from Germany into France it becomes still more difficult to decide whether or not it is to be described as pantheism in any of the forms which it has there assumed. The Abbé Maret, one of the historians of pantheism, represents not only M. Cousin but all the chief members of the Eclectic school as pantheists. This is, however, a very exaggerated view. M. Cousin himself can merely be charged with holding tenets which involve pantheism, not with explicitly teaching it; while the eclectics as a body have maintained the cause of theism with conspicuous zeal and talent. The views of M. Renan as to Deity are so vague and incoherent that one hesitates to attach to them any name. He prays with rapt devotion to the Father, the Father in heaven, and we fancy we are overhearing the supplications of a Christian theist; he vows, "I think there is not in the universe an intelligence superior to that of man," and we conclude that he is an atheist; he asks, "Who knows if the highest term of progress after millions of ages may not evoke the absolute consciousness of the universe, and in this consciousness the awakening of all that lived?" and we answer here is

¹ See Appendix XXXIX.

pantheism : but what he really is, or even in the main is, it is almost impossible to ascertain. The theism, I fear, is a mere semblance, and "Our Father in heaven" on his lips merely equivalent to "Our Father the abyss," to whom he assures us that "we feel ourselves to be in mysterious affinity." The true state of his mind, if we may venture to say so, appears to be one of perpetual oscillation between atheism and pantheism—between a God who is merely "the category of the ideal" and a God who is a blind but mighty fatality, labouring to bring forth by a slow and painful self-evolution an absolute intelligence—a man-God, in whose consciousness the thoughts and feelings of all the generations of humanity may be comprehended.

The ablest attempt which has been made in France in the present day to substitute for the ordinary idea of God one derived from the principles of idealism, is that of M. Vacherot in his 'Metaphysics and Science.' With all his speculative enthusiasm and talent, however, he has only reached the poor result that God must be regarded as the ideal of the reason, as abstract but not real being, as what exists only by thought and for thought. We can scarcely call this pantheism, because, instead of implying that God is the source, substance, and explanation of the universe, it supposes that He is the source,

substance, and explanation of nothing—existing merely as a notion.¹

In our English speech pantheism has been sung by Shelley, preached by Emerson, and recommended in loose rhetorical fashion by various writers, but it has not yet been presented in the form of a carefully reasoned theory.²

¹ See Appendix XL.

² See Appendix XLI.