

**ATHEISM AND PANTHEISM: A LECTURE  
DELIVERED BEFORE THE YOUNG MEN'S  
ASSOCIATION FOR MUTUAL  
IMPROVEMENT IN THE CITY OF ALBANY,  
ON FRIDAY EVENING, MARCH 10, 1848**

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Atheism and Pantheism: A Lecture Delivered Before the Young Men's Association for Mutual Improvement in the City of Albany, on Friday Evening, March 10, 1848 by Charles Murray Nairne

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**CHARLES MURRAY NAIRNE**

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**Atheism and Pantheism,**

A

**LECTURE**

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

**YOUNG MEN'S ASSOCIATION**

FOR

**MUTUAL IMPROVEMENT IN THE CITY OF ALBANY,**

ON

**FRIDAY EVENING, MARCH 10, 1848.**

**BY CHARLES MURRAY NAIRNE, M. A.,**  
*Prof. of Mathematics, etc., in the Albany Female Academy.*



**ALBANY:**

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**1848.**

## CORRESPONDENCE.

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ALBANY, March 17, 1848.

DEAR SIR:

The undersigned committee take great pleasure in communicating to you the following resolution, passed unanimously, at the last meeting of our Board:

"Resolved, That a committee of three be appointed by the President, to request of Professor NAIRNE, a copy of his Lecture before the Association for publication; and that if the same be obtained, the said committee proceed to publish it."

To the above, permit us to add our earnest congratulations on the brilliant success of that effort, and our hope that the public and ourselves may be gratified with its speedy re-appearance in the form proposed.

We remain, Rev. and Dear Sir,

Yours most respectfully,

M. W. L'AMOUREUX,  
WM. DEY ERMAND,  
WM. B. SPRAGUE, JR.,

Committee.

Professor NAIRNE.

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ALBANY, 18th March, 1848.

GENTLEMEN:

When I first heard, unexpectedly, that a desire had been expressed for the publication of my Lecture before your Association, on Atheism and Pantheism, I was strongly inclined, for reasons which I need not here specify, respectfully to refuse acceding to the request. But I now find that this desire is so general and decided, that I defer at once to the public judgment, and cheerfully surrender to you the manuscript, that you may use it as you see fit.

May I beg that you will accept for yourselves, and convey to the Association, my grateful acknowledgement of the very flattering manner in which my services have been received.

I have the honor to be, gentlemen,

Very faithfully yours,

CHARLES MURRAY NAIRNE.

To M. W. L'AMOUREUX,  
WM. DEY ERMAND, and  
WM. B. SPRAGUE, JR., Esq's.

**ERRATA.**

On page 15, 16th line from top, instead of *he were*, read *he himself were*.

On page 20, 14th line from top, instead of *to be baffled read to be baffled*.

## ATHEISM AND PANTHEISM.

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In bringing up the rear of the body of distinguished lecturers who have this season addressed you, I have chosen a subject which, I trust, will not be found unsuitable to the occasion. Anticipated in other themes by some of my predecessors, I have taken refuge in the common-place, but ever momentous question of a God; and from my humble position, I may be able, in the discussion of that question, to throw some light, however feeble; upon the various matters which, from year to year, are brought under your notice, and thus to direct you, so far, both as to the right mode of pursuing your studies — for though retired from the schools, you are still an association of students — and as to the great end whither all your investigations ought to conduct you.

There can be no doubt that, apart altogether from the disclosures of Nature and Revelation concerning a Creator and Ruler of the universe, much that is interesting, profitable and every way worthy of the human intellect, may be evolved from the worlds of matter and of mind. The laws, corporeal and spiritual, of our own wondrous constitution — the curious processes which are carried on in the laboratories of earth, air and sea — the chemistry and mechanics of organization, analogous, but infinitely superior, to human operations — the magnificent and complicated machinery of the heavens — the inventions and discoveries by which the comfort and progress of society are secured — the moral, political and intellectual means which have been, or ought to be, adopted for the well-being of individuals and communities,



and for the furtherance of the dignity of man — all these, and many more, are subjects deserving of your most attentive consideration, and certain to repay your researches in a return of mental, if not of material wealth. They are in themselves, and with reference to the present life alone, topics of profound concernment. But, at the same time, when viewed only in that light, they lose by far the most important part of that interest and value which really belong to them. Then, even their beauty and sublimity are but very partially discerned, and the whole field they occupy is overspread with an obscurity, through which, indeed, much that is good and great, fair and wonderful, may be perceived, but which, nevertheless, behooves to be felt as an obstruction and a source of perplexity, that every truth-loving and order-loving mind — every truly philosophic spirit — longs earnestly to have removed.

In the stillness of a star-lit night, you may have cast your eyes over some fine landscape, and as you traced the glimmering outline of the woods, and recognized the dark masses of the mountain range, and saw the gems of the sky reflected in the river's bosom, as, with placid sound, it rolled along, and descried the mansions, turreted and grey, or less fantastic and less hallowed by time, rising through the shade, and moralizing the whole scene with the interests and occupations of man; and as you stood and gazed, you have said within yourselves, how fair would this prospect be, were the moon now pouring her lustre on river, and wood, and dwelling, and hill; and how passing fair, when it lies glowing in the full sunshine that at once discloses and augments its loveliness! Nay, the very pleasure with which, in the gloom, you behold it, is mainly owing to your recollection of the daylight glories of similar scenes; and you can scarcely fancy the dim and dull impression which it would make on a being who could not, from such recollection, fill up its proportions, and body forth its hidden features in the exercise of an imagination which had been informed by the actual survey of the unveiled beauties of nature. It is even so with creation when contemplated apart from a Creator. It is even so with the present condition of things

when regarded apart from the God whose attributes and ways the Bible unfolds. In this case, there lowers a most perplexing obscurity over the whole. I can discern beauties, but they are clouded; harmonies, but when I attempt to track them, they fade in the infinity of the surrounding darkness; design, but it is only fragmentary, and not seldom apparently frustrated; operations, benevolent, and to some extent, effectual, but often cruelly interfered with, and rendered perplexingly abortive; something grand and graceful, it is true, but shadowy and evanescent, dreamy and dubious, without beginning and without end; and I am puzzled to account for interruptions, and vacuities, and discrepancies, and disturbances, and feel intensely the need of some superior illumination to irradiate the entire field of view, and dispel the mystery — a mystery as much of confusion as of vastness — that broods over every thing before me. Chains of causation I can partially trace, but I discern no omnipotent hand from which they are suspended; goodly fabrics of antecedent and consequent I can see, but no rock of ages on which their foundations are laid; motion I perceive, but no prime mover; regularity, but no regulator; law, but no lawgiver; life, but no fountain of life; scattered portions of truth, but no great being who is the substance of truth — in whom all truth centres — and of whose nature all truth is only the discovery and the outward expression. Now, the existence of a supreme creator and ruler is the master-key to the whole mystery. It is the day spring from on high which, illuminating this terrene, brings to view its order and dependence, its origin and its end; enables us to walk surely like them that walk at noon, instead of groping and peering like those who walk in darkness; and gives rest to the soul's tired and jaded wings, by presenting an ultimate object whereon, in common with the entire universe, the exploring spirit reposes from its travel, and is satisfied.

When I first look up unto the heavens, I behold nothing save an expanse of splendid confusion — a high o'erarching canopy glittering with lights of spiritual brightness. Their distances are all the same to my vision, and they appear scattered over the

mighty concave at random. No sound issues from the aerial dome—no living thing can be discerned—walking amidst or underneath these lamps; and when they themselves are, at length, discovered to move, their march is tardy and without array; for they fall not in ranks, and some of them seem to wander even from their own circles. Amid the multiplicity of luminaries there is nevertheless obscurity. The stars are still the stars of night. Whence are they, I ask, and what are they? What is their nature and what their use? Is the frame-work in which they are inlaid really a firmament—a substantial resisting canopy—and do they stud its surface merely to regale my eyes, and exercise my curious fancy? I cannot tell.

As yet I cannot tell; but let me grasp the torch of science. The astronomer demonstrates that these lamps are orbs—worlds like our own; that they revolve in paths of geometric symmetry, although so vast that the whole vault over-head is too limited a scroll to exhibit such a portion of these paths as would determine these figures to our sight; and that, throughout all space, there prevails a law which governs the huge globes wherewith its amplitudes are filled, and under this law, that which originally appears disorder is regularity, far more accurate and exquisite than that of the most ingenious and delicate of human contrivances. Now I begin to approach towards satisfaction. The firmament, I find, is not a solid crystalline roof; neither is there any longer disorder among the starry train. My mind now cleaves the depths of space, and to the piercing glance of science, mechanism, stupendous both in magnitude and harmony, is disclosed in its mighty and mysterious recesses. But after all I am not yet satisfied. My spirit pants with the majesty of its own discoveries. I am confounded by the very grandeur which has been evoked. Amidst an illimitable universe I now stand awe-struck and baffled, as if too daring in my curiosity, I had intruded, under guidance of a potent genius, into a region of sublimity, where even he might fear to tread. Here, however, it is that Revelation comes to assure me of what my reason had already conceived. It tells me that there is a God, and that God reigneth.