

THE ATHEIST: AN ORIGINAL POEM

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The Atheist: An Original Poem by Arthur Lilley

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ARTHUR LILLEY

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ORIGINAL POEM**



THE ATHEIST.

An Original Poem.

BY
ARTHUR LILLEY.

"Father of all, in every age,
In every clime ador'd,
By saint, by savage, and by sage—
Jehovah, Jove, or Lord."

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THE ATHEIST.

CANTO I.

His life was in the evening shadows now,
His outward form to set, his soul to rise ;
And, by the wrinkles on his jaded brow,
'Twas visible in life's bold enterprise
He had not let his days pass by for nought,
But seized the time, and for earth's knowledge sought.

He'd read of all the pomp of Syria's kings,
How they had flourished in the days gone by ;
But all their glory now in memory sings,
Only the ruined city now is nigh ;
All else has fled—pride, pomp are in the dust ;
So perish all who but in self have trust.

He'd read of Greece, that land of might and fame,
How it had held the world beneath its sway,
O Greeks ! why is your power not the same ?
Is this the poet's haunt—the hero's day ?
O Greece ! thou glory of the ancient world,
What drove thy heroes out, and thee o'erhurled ?

He'd read how Rome had led her legions forth,
And with her might the nations overcame,
Piercing from east to west, from south to north,
Until mankind stood trembling at her name :
Now all is ruin, and seek where you can
A Roman—earth knows not of such a man !

Had they but known the Truth as we have known,
They might have held the world with such a power
That all mankind would kneel before God's throne,
And they had been the same until this hour,
What they were then—the mightiest in the land,
In mind and glory, as God's chosen band.

But God's immortal wisdom did not deign
That they should bear His message to the world ;
But that above them other lands should reign,
And all their glory to the ground be hurled—
A dread example to each Christian land,
That without God no power can ever stand.

Yet what had all his learning for him done ?
He was alone, and pondering o'er the past :
His years of manly strength had long since gone ;
'Twas strange to him that nothing here could last :
Friends he had known in youth, in manhood, fled ;
Some far in distant climes, some with the dead.

Many whom in his early youth he knew,
Strong, young, just entering on the road of life,
Met death before they had a distant view
Of life's maturer years of joy and strife :
It troubled him that thus they had gone by,
And in the silent grave so soon to lie.

Why should we live so brief, so short a time ?
We scarcely look around us ere we die ;
And earth is filled with violence and crime ;
Men smile at death and calmly pass it by :
Not all his learning, all his mighty lore,
Could solve that question, often asked before.

He was a man, kind-hearted and sincere,
Pitied the helpless, aided the distress'd ;
He loved the truth, and had a conscience clear,
And by the poor his name was always blest ;
Riches he had, and all that earth could give ;
This only troubled him, why man should live ?

He was alone—except a little child
That was his all to him in his last years ;
It was so young, so gentle, and so mild,
It made him love it and forget his cares ;
When he was wrapt in thought, as even now,
It laid a kiss upon his aged brow.

It was the orphan of his dearest friend,
Who on his death-bed placed it in his hand,
And said, "This little one from sin defend,
And in my place a father to it stand."
His promise was the last the father heard—
"I will defend it"—and he kept his word.

It knew not that he had no faith in God ;
He never told it—no, he would not mar
Its happy hours, as steadfastly it trod,
Looking above with faith beyond yon star :
He marvell'd that its inexperienced mind,
In loving God, such happiness could find.

For, ever since that child had been his care,
His thoughts had been disturbed, his conscience spoke
And urged him of a future to beware ;
But of a life beyond he had no hope :
Yet, when at night it took its last "Adieu,"
And kissed him smiling said, "May God bless you! —