

47.
Natural
Religion.

But a question of considerable importance has arisen in reference to that body of doctrine which during the last two hundred years has sprung up and been cultivated under various names—such as Natural Religion, Deism, or Rationalism. This doctrine professes to be based upon the ordinary and common experience of thinking persons, assisted in various ways by scientific reasoning and the outcome of historical research. It professes to collect, contain, and substantiate the principal and most important tenets of Christian ethics, but to dispense with the assistance of any special revelation other than that afforded by common-sense, philosophical reasoning, and the natural feeling of obligation commonly termed the voice of conscience. This body of doctrine was elaborated with more or less fulness and consistency in the eighteenth century, and found many adherents, especially among the cultured classes, among literary and scientific persons in England, France, and latterly also in Germany. It called itself Deism or, later, Theism—the difference in general being that the former believes only in what is called a Divine or moral Order, whereas the latter considers this Divine Order to culminate in and be dependent on a personal Deity. Recent speculation in Germany, notably in the school of Ritschl, does not admit that such a natural religion can be satisfactorily elaborated and maintained; it holds, further, that whatever may be correct and spiritually helpful in such a doctrine, requires some higher sanction which will prevent it from succumbing on the one side to the attacks of logical criticism, and on the other to the selfish interests of human beings: it must,