

58.
Hume on
Religion.

preciated only in the light of subsequent developments, we may probably exhaust what is important in British contributions to our subject by referring to three or four names in the course of the last one hundred and fifty years. There are, first and foremost—and by no means out of date—Hume's writings, which deal sceptically from various points of view with the religious problem. In addition to the 'Essay on Miracles' already referred to, we have repeated treatment of the subject: in the 'Inquiry' (1748, section xi.); in the 'Natural History of Religion' (1757); and, lastly, in the 'Dialogues concerning Natural Religion' (posthumously published 1779, but written before 1751). The subject was no doubt of great interest to Hume, as is testified not only by these writings but also by his private correspondence; the latter also shows that the author was as much aware of the inconclusiveness of his arguments as his biographers and numerous critics have been, who have found it difficult to decide what definite position, if any, Hume really arrived at.¹ Perhaps he did not feel as keenly as thinkers since his

¹ The best account of Hume's pertinent speculations is to be found in Huxley's volume, 'Hume' (John Morley's 'English Men of Letters,' 1902). Fully one-third of the little volume is devoted to the religious and ethical problems, and of this a very large portion consists merely of extracts from Hume's works, very judiciously selected and commentated. Huxley seems to endorse in general what Hume said of the two opposing "hypotheses" — Spinozism and Orthodoxy. "I am deafened with

the noise of a hundred voices that treat the first hypothesis with detestation and scorn, and the second with applause and veneration. I turn my attention to these hypotheses to see what may be the reason of so great a partiality, and find that they have the same fault of being unintelligible, and that, as far as we can understand them, they are so much alike that 'tis impossible to discover any absurdity in one which is not common to both of them." (Hume's Works, 'Treatise of Human Nature.')