or any attempt to bring the subject into discussion. It was not only the primitive Christians that were stigmatized by heathens as atheists, because they renounced the divini­ties of the heathen creed, but the same reproach was long before cast upon those among the heathens themselves, who, with however pious disposition, ventured to speculate on religion. A traditionary religion will tolerate any laxity of thought or conduct which professedly admits its authority, whilst it peremptorily puts down every thing which impugns the principle of absolute deference to its authority. Thus we shall find, that, where that principle is carried to the ut­most, there co-exists with it a scarcely concealed infidelity, and an unrestrained licentiousness of conduct ; and, at the same time, also an extreme sensitiveness in regard to devi­ation from the orthodox profession and language. We have unhappily seen this in those Christian countries, where the true faith, the principle of devout submission to the word of God, has been transformed and perverted into a doctrine of implicit deference to the authority of the ministers them­selves of that word. There,—as, for example, in Spain and Italy,—where the authority of the church is bowed to most submissively, practical infidelity and immorality shew their front with impunity, whilst the expression of opinion or argu­ment on questions of theology is discouraged and silenced, if no longer now, as once, crushed at its outbreak by the dark terrors of an Inquisition. The same fact was intensely exemplified in heathen Athens. At no place was piety, as piety was understood by heathens, more in honour. No state boasted such a tradition of sacred associations as Athens. In none were there so many festivals and solem­nities of religious observance, as in Athens.@@1 In none did the priests of religion hold such sway. Witness their power over Alcibiades, at the moment of his political tri­umph, and amidst the caresses and admiration of his fel­low-citizens, when he felt himself obliged to relinquish his command in Sicily, and desert his country, rather than en­counter at home the threatened prosecution for his profana­tion of sacred things. Witness their power again in the instance of the same Alcibiades, at his restoration to the command of the army, when, to conciliate their favour, he delays the urgent expedition, and keeps the soldiers under arms along the road by which the sacred procession passed from Athens to Eleusis. Witness further, the frequent prosecutions at Athens on charges of impiety of which we read, and of which we have monuments in extant orations. But, amidst this strictness of external pro­fession, in no place was there a more entire license as to practical irreligion. Their festivals abounded with rude and obscene mirth. Their drama, whilst it inculcated in direct precept the belief and worship of the gods, in­dulged in the most profane ribaldry and ludicrous repre­sentation of sacred things. Yet were these follies and ex­cesses tolerated, because under them a regard was still maintained to the authority which upheld the religion, as in the “ mysteries ” and “ moralities ” enacted with the connivance of the papal power in modern times ; and the people at large were satisfied with a religious system, which was exhibited to them as so good-humoured and humane. They were tolerated, indeed, but not without the like injury to the religious feelings, as in the parallel

cases, where a corrupted secular Christianity has ventured on the like palliations of its despotism. For all the while the people were losing their hold of the popular religion. Those who thought at all on the subject, either rejected it altogether, or accounted it a mere matter of opinion and external ordinance ; whilst those, on the other hand, who were content to receive every thing traditionary as divine on the mere principle of deference to the priests, readily engrafted every new superstition on the received religion. Thus, whilst infidelity and superstition grew up at Athens, and flourished together, and often perhaps in the same mind, the connexion between religion and morality was altogether lost sight of and dissolved. Men began to regard them­selves as devout, and friends of the gods, whilst they were committing deeds of violence and lust, and blindly and wickedly endeavoured to support the cause of religion by forcible suppression of the truth, and persecution of those who subjected their tenets or their rites to the test of inquiry. Thus, whilst Aristophanes was amusing the people, not of Athens only, but from all parts of Greece, at the public festivals, with ludicrous representations of the popular theology, and loosening more and more any exist­ing associations of reverence towards the objects of their worship, severe prosecutions were carried on from time to time against all who in any way made religion a matter of debate, or seriously brought it into question with the people. The same persons can take part in the vulgar low jest, and shew their real contempt of religion by their care­lessness about oaths and the practical duties of religion, and yet join zealously in the prosecution of offenders against established notions of religion. It is the same habit of mind in both cases ; a habit of looking at religion as a ge­neral rule of orthodox profession,—as a rule binding on a community, and a test of its soundness of doctrine,—rather than as a personal concern, and a trial of the spirit of a man. “ He has brought Gentiles into the temple, he has abolished circumcision, he has profaned our religion,” was the outcry against St. Paul ; and yet these same persons thus clamo­rous against the apostle, were minding earthly things all the while, sticklers for externals, yet idolaters in their per­sonal religion, as men of covetousness, and slaves to the appetites of the body.

At Athens, accordingly, though there was no freedom of religious opinion, the religion might be employed to excite festive mirth, and gτatify the levity and licentiousness of a dissolute yet intellectual populace, amidst the charms of poetry and music and the solemn graceful dance. For then the associations of deference to the mysterious agency which held together the traditions of the popular creed were not violently broken asunder. There still remained in the minds of the people an awe at the indefinite mystic truth, hidden under the embroidered veil held before their eyes. They knew that the splendid drama of religion, which at once gratified their refined intellectual taste and their sen­sibility, was not the whole of their religion. They had al­so the Eleusinian mysteries ; rites of religion performed in secrecy, and fenced round with the terror of death to him that should divulge them ; delegated to a few, the initiated only, and incommunicable to the vulgar ; of which the po­pular rites were but the rude symbols.@@3 The popular wor-

@@@, Arutoph. Nub. 298. ou <J⅜3αcς *dtfηr<w itgω>, oa*

*μuβroδixoς δ6μo{ b nλsraii aγlaii ataδtixsυτa∣, c,υm>ιalς* n iso7{ *δωgημara, ta6ι i'* u∙ψeotpe⅞ *xal αγάλματα, tiιβτiφatti τι eiω> ΰυβίαι 6aλiaι* rs *τawoiarrcuς b ägatf, κ.r.λ∙*

Also Thucyd, ii. 38; and De Repub. Athen, attributed to Xenophon.

@@@\* J30crat. Panepyr. p. 54. *'hi o'γr* oEw’ *άλλοΐζ* η ro⅝ *μιμυr∣μboιi a×t>ικn . . . xai* τή» rsλtn)r, r; *oι μsriχrltτt{ τ∣ξi τt rijf τou βiov τtλtυτης, xal rtü βυμτa>τe{ aiω>oς,* ⅛∂∕ouς *τaf ιλπ!δa{ iχβuβn.*