

SPENCER'S UNKNOWABLE AS THE BASIS OF RELIGION.

- 1.—*First Principles*. By HERBERT SPENCER. New York: D. Appleton & Co.
- 2.—*Principles of Psychology*. By HERBERT SPENCER. New York: D. Appleton & Co.
- 3.—*Outlines of Cosmic Philosophy*. By JOHN FISKE. Boston: James R. Osgood & Co.

MR. Herbert Spencer's treatment of the unknowable is, to the present writer's mind, the most unsatisfactory philosophical work he has done. It deals too much with metaphysical subtleties and obscurities, and withal appears to involve manifest absurdities, recalling to one's mind too vividly the "jargon of the schoolmen." When viewed in the light of scientific method, it appears to bear upon its face the unmistakable marks of mere system-building. It does not possess the elements necessary to recommend it either to theologians or to scientists; and I can but regret that the author should have prefaced a great work on philosophy with what must prove to be rather a stumbling-block than a stepping-stone.

Mr. Spencer labors to show that the unknowable something which underlies phenomena is the common basis upon which science and religion may harmoniously unite. To constitute such basis, the Unknowable should be a fundamental element, or essential constituent, of both science and religion, or so related to them that both must recognize in it the power which shall disarm their antagonism and bind them together in one. Is such the character of the Unknowable?

I. — *Of its Logical Aspects.*

1. We begin with Mr. Spencer's chapter on Ultimate Scientific Ideas. He passes the fundamental elements of secular

knowledge under review one after another, and finds that we are unable really to comprehend any of them. Space and time are mysteries which defy comprehension; matter, force, and motion are equally intractable; and, when we turn from the outer to the inner world, we find consciousness to be an enigma which admits of no solution.

Now, there is no escape from the fact that, in contemplating the phenomena of the subjective and objective worlds, we are deeply impressed with the presence of mystery in them,—a something which we cannot now, and probably never can, comprehend. This view is universally accepted, and by each instinctively upon the basis of his own experience and reflection. If one should not accept it upon such basis, we fear he would not be convinced of it, nor yet dazed into it, by Spencer's and Fiske's brilliant pyrotechnic displays of metaphysics.

There is a qualified sense in which the conclusions of this chapter are unmistakably true, but we are almost led to doubt them by the means made use of to establish them. Thus, in regard to motion, we read:—

"Motion, as taking place apart from those limitations of space which we habitually associate with it, is totally unthinkable. For motion is change of place; but, in unlimited space, change of place is inconceivable, because place itself is inconceivable. Place can be conceived only by reference to other places, and, in the absence of objects dispersed through space, a place could be conceived only in relation to the limit of space; whence it follows that in unlimited space place cannot be conceived,—all places must be equidistant from boundaries which do not exist. Thus, while we are obliged to think that there is an absolute motion, we find absolute motion incomprehensible. . . . A body traveling at a given velocity cannot be brought to a state of rest, or no velocity, without passing through all intermediate velocities. At first sight, nothing seems easier than to imagine it doing this. It is quite possible to think of its motion as diminishing insensibly until it becomes infinitesimal; and many will think it equally possible to pass in thought from infinitesimal motion to no motion. But this is an error. Mentally follow out the decreasing velocity as long as you please, and there still remains *some* velocity. Halve and again halve the rate of movement for ever, yet movement still exists; and the smallest movement is separated by an impassable gap from no movement. As something, however minute, is infinitely great in comparison with nothing, so is even the least conceivable motion infinite as compared with rest."—"*First Principles*," pp. 56, 57.

The point of mystification here happens to be quite obvious. The trick is in halving the velocities. By substituting the word space for velocity, it may be shown in the same way that it is impossible to conceive how two converging lines can meet. The

author might have illustrated by the race between the greyhound and the hare. The hound ran twice as fast as the hare, but the hare had a league the start. So when the hound had made the league, the hare was a half league ahead; and when the hound had made this half league, the hare was one-quarter league ahead; and so on to infinity. Generally, when the hound has made the last given distance which separated the two, the hare is still half that distance ahead; therefore, that the hound can overtake the hare is inconceivable. This is good logic of the kind; and the kind is just like Mr. Spencer's above given. Its virtue consists in the halving. Yet any schoolboy can tell us that, when the hound has run two leagues and the hare one, they will be together, and that the next jump will carry the hound ahead, and this is precisely the thing most easily conceived.

In regard to consciousness we read:—

"But, it may be said, though we cannot *know* consciousness to be finite in duration, because neither of its limits can be actually reached, yet we can very well *conceive* it to be so. No; not even this is true. In the first place, we cannot *conceive* the terminations of that consciousness which alone we really know—our own—any more than we can *perceive* its terminations. For in truth the two acts are here one. In either case such terminations must be, as above said, not presented in thought, but represented; and they must be represented as in the act of occurring. Now, to represent the termination of consciousness as occurring in ourselves is to think of ourselves as contemplating the cessation of the last state of consciousness; and this implies a supposed continuance of consciousness after its last state, which is absurd. . . . As we found it was impossible really to conceive Rest becoming Motion and Motion becoming Rest, so here we find it impossible really to conceive either the beginning or the ending of those changes which constitute consciousness."—"*First Principles*," pp. 62, 63.

Is this the kind of reasoning to convince us that there is mystery in ourselves and in Nature? Are we not more likely to become impressed with the mystery of the method than with the mystery which it is intended to establish? We can believe that two and two make four without resorting to mathematical intricacies to prove it; and, without resorting to metaphysical intricacies, we can readily believe that there is that in the great field of existence which is by its nature incomprehensible to man as at present constituted. It is easy to admit the really unknowable, but, inasmuch as it does not fall within the scope of science, it is not so easy to perceive how science is to recognize it as the

basis of reconciliation with religion. That is especially the difficulty which concerns us.

2. We turn briefly to the author's chapter on Ultimate Religious Ideas. He affirms that "we cannot think at all about the impressions which the external world produces on us without thinking of them as caused; and we cannot carry out an inquiry concerning their causation without inevitably committing ourselves to the hypothesis of a first cause." Upon the basis thus secured as a sort of preliminary assumption, the author proceeds with his reasoning. He insists that "we are driven by inexorable logic" to conclude that this first cause is infinite and independent.

"If it is dependent, it cannot be the First Cause, for that must be the First Cause on which it depends. It is not enough to say that it is partially independent, since this implies some necessity which determines its partial dependence; and this necessity, be what it may, must be a higher cause, or the true First Cause, which is a contradiction. But to think of the First Cause as totally independent, is to think of it as that which exists in the absence of all other existence, seeing that, if the presence of any other existence is necessary, it must be partially dependent on that other existence, and so cannot be the First Cause. Not only, however, must the First Cause be a form of being which has no necessary relation to any other form of being, but it can have no necessary relation within itself. There can be nothing in it which determines change, and yet nothing which prevents change. For if it contains something which impose such necessities or restraints, this something must be a cause higher than the First Cause, which is absurd. Thus the First Cause must be in every sense perfect, complete, total: including within itself all power, and transcending all law. Or, to use the established word, it must be absolute."—"*First Principles*," p. 38.

These "unavoidable conclusions" being established, quotations are given from Mr. Mansel to show that they involve inevitable contradictions, and that it is not possible for us to know any thing about the infinite and absolute character of the first cause. Mr. Mansel shows that the three conceptions of the cause, the infinite, and the absolute contradict one another when regarded as attributes of the same being. In conclusion he says:—

"The conception of the Absolute and Infinite, from whatever side we view it, appears encompassed with contradictions. There is a contradiction in supposing such an object to exist, whether alone or in conjunction with others; and there is a contradiction in supposing it not to exist. There is a contradiction in conceiving it as one; and there is a contradiction in conceiving it as many. There is a contradic-

tion in conceiving it as personal, and there is a contradiction in conceiving it as impersonal. It cannot, without contradiction, be represented as active; nor, without equal contradiction, be represented as inactive. It cannot be conceived as the sum of all existence, nor yet can it be conceived as a part only of that sum."

Such are the results obtained by one who writes in defence of theology, and Mr. Spencer endorses them. And, since it thus turns out upon thorough examination that the idea of a first or primary cause involves irreconcilable contradictions which place it hopelessly beyond the reach of intellectual endeavor, how comes it that we are inevitably committed to the hypothesis of a first cause? Are we not committed to such an hypothesis by intellectual vacuity, precisely as, on a certain primitive theory, we should be committed to the hypothesis of the first animal, the tortoise, upon which stands the elephant which supports the earth? The fact is that there is no need whatever of such metaphysical display to convince us that we know nothing about any supposed first cause of the existence of things. We find it a mystery, and must leave it a mystery.

"Not only is the omnipresence of something which passes comprehension that most abstract belief which is common to all religions, and which becomes the more distinct in proportion as they develop, and which remains after their discordant elements have been mutually cancelled; but it is that belief which the most unsparing criticism of each leaves unquestionable — or rather makes ever clearer. It has nothing to fear from the most inexorable logic; but, on the contrary, is a belief which the most inexorable logic shows to be more profoundly true than any religion supposes. For every religion, setting out though it does with the tacit assertion of a mystery, forthwith proceeds to give some solution of this mystery, and so asserts that it is not a mystery passing human comprehension. But an examination of the solutions they severally propound shows them to be uniformly invalid. The analysis of every possible hypothesis proves, not simply that no hypothesis is sufficient, but that no hypothesis is even thinkable. And thus the mystery which all religions recognize turns out to be a far more transcendent mystery than any of them suspect, — not a relative, but an absolute, mystery." — *First Principles*, pp. 45, 46.

By this route, also, the author arrives at a fundamental mystery, a something which we cannot understand. But difficulties appear to rise at once. Mr. Spencer assumes that this mystery is a necessary constituent of religion; but is it really such? Is it religion that discloses and recognizes this mystery? And is it consistent with the essential character of religion to accept this mystery as the basis of its reconciliation with science?

3. Leaving these difficulties for the present, we are happy to

state that we now all agree — Hamilton, Mansel, Spencer, Fiske, all of us — that what lies beyond the knowable cannot be known; that the infinite, the absolute or non-relative, the unconditioned, are all incomprehensible; "that the Power which the Universe manifests to us is utterly inscrutable." The present writer is wholly willing to accept this as an established truth, as all these writers declare it is; but they are not of this mind. They all go to work, and with deliberate intent knock down the structure thus elaborately set up, as if it were a child's cobhouse. We should like to quote them, but have not room. Suffice to say that they all, one way or another, come to the conclusion that, though we cannot know any thing about this inscrutable power, this mystery, this unknowable something, yet by inspiration (Hamilton), by the necessary laws of mind (Mansel), by the momentum of thought (Spencer), some way, we do penetrate the veil of this mystery, and invest it with a positive signification which is perfectly legitimate. We can know nothing of the infinite, absolute, unconditioned; yet, in consequence of some law or other, we find them to be unquestionable verities of thought.

Mr. Spencer declares: "It is not to be denied that so long as we confine ourselves to the purely logical aspect of the question, the propositions" concerning the absolute mystery of the unknowable "must be accepted in their entirety; but when we contemplate its more general, or psychological, aspect, we find that these propositions are imperfect statements of the truth: omitting, or rather excluding, as they do, an all-important fact. To speak specifically," he continues, "besides that definite consciousness of which logic formulates the laws, there is also an indefinite consciousness which cannot be formulated. Besides complete thoughts, and besides the thoughts which, though incomplete, admit of completion, there are thoughts which it is impossible to complete, and yet which are still real, in the sense that they are normal affections of the intellect."

He goes on to establish the validity of this "all important fact." And what is the method used? It is not theological, — he does not appeal to inspiration; it is not by infallible authority, — he issues no decree; the author would hardly admit that it is dogmatic; what then is it, if not purely logical? The method employed to evade the full weight and consequence of this "absolute

mystery" is, so far as we can discern, of precisely the same logical character as that previously used to establish the fact of such absolute mystery; with this difference, however,—that in the one case the method is successful, in the other not. We must refer the reader to the nine pages of argument which follow to prove the positive element in our conception of the absolute and unconditioned. Only a few of the leading points can be brought under review here.

He affirms that the relativity of knowledge "distinctly postulates the positive existence of something beyond the relative. To say that we cannot know the Absolute, is, by implication, to affirm that there *is* an Absolute. In our very denial of our power to learn *what* the Absolute is, there lies hidden the assumption *that* it is; and the making of this assumption proves that the Absolute has been present to the mind, not as a nothing, but as a something." Very well; this is plausible. Not being a metaphysician, I declare that I cannot know, or conceive of, the "quiddity," the "hæcceity or thisness," the "ubication or where-ness," of things. Do I by this denial of a knowledge of these things prove that they are present to my mind, not as nothings, but as somethings? Again, I disclaim any knowledge of such entities as "aureity," "inneity," "caloric," "electrical fluid;" what, therefore, is the value of the implication involved in this disclaimer as far as proving their real existence, or even their presence in my mind, is concerned? There are still physiologists who cannot think of life without attributing its functions to the potency of a "vital principle." They think they have an idea of this vital principle as a real something; they believe fully in its existence; but it turns out that the more they investigate in the truly scientific spirit, the more this entity eludes their search, till eventually it vanishes as a phantom of the imagination. It is the old method, honest indeed, but not wise, of filling up an intellectual blank with a name, and then imagining that the name represents something real. There is not one of the metaphysical myths, such as "quiddity," "inneity," etc., but may be treated of in Spencer's words concerning the Unknowable. They are examples of "indefinite consciousness which cannot be formulated." They "are thoughts which it is impossible to com-

plete; but yet" they "are still real in the sense that they are normal affections of the intellect."

The Absolute and Unconditioned are still more unquestionably mythical, and, if they be purely verbal myths, they occupy a region of comparative immunity from logical assault, since they are postulated beyond the reach of science, and, we are informed, even beyond the reach of logic itself; consequently, it is hardly to be expected that we can use logical means to invalidate them. A philosopher's faith in corpuscles of light may be attacked and overthrown by the methods of science; but there is no such exposure of his faith in the Absolute and Unconditioned, since the object of it lies in the absolute nowhere of the impenetrable unknown. Still, since, notwithstanding Mr. Spencer's disclaimer, the methods used to establish this doctrine are logical in form, we may examine them and expose their weaknesses; but the only efficient way of getting rid of these verbal myths is to cultivate assiduously the knowable, whereupon the myths will perish of inanition.

Mr. Spencer would base an explanation of our conception of the Absolute on the necessary antithesis of thought. "The conception of a part is impossible without the conception of a whole; there can be no idea of equality without one of inequality. . . . The Relative is itself conceivable as such only by opposition to the Irrelative or Absolute." Hamilton maintains his fealty to logical results in asserting that the reality of one of these correlates does not necessarily guarantee the reality of the other: that is, that the relative actually obtains, but not so its correlative, the Absolute. We are not able to discover that Mr. Spencer makes any headway against this view. If our conception of the relative and knowable imply the Absolute and Unknowable, then must our conception of entity imply non-entity, and of existence non-existence. Admitting, upon the authority of Mr. Spencer's reasoning, that we cannot understand existence as such without postulating non-existence,—does that, therefore, prove the existence of non-existence? If it does not, then does the mental necessity of thinking by antithesis prove nothing more than the fact that the real existence of one of the correlates presumes the mental presence in a vague sort of way of the other, without affording the least warrant of its real existence. The "presence,"

in such instances obtains merely in the form of a negation. Such correlates as the Infinite, the Absolute, the Unconditioned, the Unknowable, Non-entity, Non-existence, and the like, are, as Hamilton affirms them to be, mere negations of thought. They are hypothesized quantities, which have a use without any real existence even in thought; they are simply terms to represent the unknown and fill an intellectual void. As the thinkable reaches its outer limits, reason has to cease elaborating for want of material. By contrast, the unthinkable or unknowable is suggested to fill a vacuum in thought, and a name is invented with negative import, and often of negative form,—as irrelative, unconditioned, etc. If any other meaning than negation becomes associated with the name, it is put there by the myth-making faculty.

Mr. Spencer's final effort in this field reaches the acme of logical audacity, being nothing less than an attempt to show how a consciousness may be constituted of the uniform and unlimited, "when, by its very nature, consciousness is possible only under forms and limits." He makes this out by finding in consciousness an element which persists through all changes, and which he characterizes as "the undifferentiated substance of consciousness," whatever that may mean; whereupon it is declared that our consciousness of absolute existence is the obverse of our self-consciousness. Here the author appears to get down to the absolute which underlies consciousness to account for our supposed conception of the absolute which underlies phenomena; whereas the one form of the absolute is precisely as inconceivable as the other, and it does not solve one riddle to propose a second. To insist upon our consciousness of the absolute in consciousness, for any purpose, is to suggest a painful contrast between such philosophy and that with which the author elsewhere illuminates the origin and development of the mental faculties.

We may admit that Mr. Spencer's "Transfigured Realism" is fully established by an exposition which is at once brilliant and unanswerable; but that is very far from admitting all that he insists upon concerning the Absolute and Unconditioned. I cannot think of the real or noumenal as absolute—as without diversity or parts. I am perfectly aware of the effort made to show that it is absolute, but the effort comes to my conscious-

ness, whether I will or no, as a desperate plunge into the dark. Our consciousness of phenomena is diversified; whence the origin of this almost infinite diversity in consciousness? I cannot conceive that the ten thousand unlike impressions made upon my senses are caused by a noumenon of dead uniformity throughout. If what I am, and the world is, as phenomena, are products in consciousness of the noumenal something which underlies all phenomena, whence the diversity of the one, if there is no diversity in the other? Phenomena, mental or other, are the manifestations of the noumenon, and "the order of its manifestations throughout all mental phenomena proves to be the same as the order of its manifestations throughout all material phenomena." Our consciousness has to do first and last with the diversified, the relative, and the conditioned, and there is no basis upon which to rest this doctrine of the Absolute and Unconditioned. It turns out, therefore, to be merely a metaphysical myth.

Our philosophers confess that they cannot affirm, of the Reality which underlies phenomena, that it is either mental or material, personal or impersonal, one or many; and yet they are confident that it is Absolute. Now, we are compelled to suspect that there is a good deal of playing with this word Absolute. Absolute existence is spoken of in the sense of actual existence as distinct from phenomenal existence. This is well enough; but, when the assumption is made that such existence has no parts, is non-relative, and without diversity within itself, and therefore Absolute, the word is used in a different sense. In his chapter on Ultimate Scientific Ideas, Mr. Spencer speaks of the "realities" which such ideas represent. But the plural form is soon dropped, and the word spelled with a capital R. It then begins to look formidable. The word absolute is subjected to a similar change, and, when the two words are put together as Absolute Reality, hardly any body would have the courage to attack them. It would not do now to write noumena; it must be Noumenon. To be worthy of the subject, unknown reality must be written Unknown Reality. Absolute Reality is easily transformed into Absolute Existence, and this into Absolute Being. We have now advanced from simple and unpretentious "realities" to Absolute Being, — to the Unknowable in whose charmed

presence Religion and Science are to meet each other in loving embrace. We are now on sacred ground, and criticism would be obtuse indeed, if it did not realize its exposure to the charge of irreverence.

It is an easy process for the human mind to transform these names of negation into myths. Such metaphysical entities abound in the earliest accounts we have of philosophical effort among the ancients; they made up the great body of medieval philosophy; they have played a prominent part in the history of science from Aristotle down almost to our own times; but, wherever and whenever real science can turn upon them the full rays of its intellectual light, they "flee like ghosts at the approach of day." Mentally building the Absolute and Unconditioned into an entity is legitimately the work of the myth-making instincts. The power has come down to us by direct hereditary succession, and must be regarded in the light of a "survival." The human mind is becoming so busy with the knowable that the myth-faculty is degenerating into the rudimentary form.

II. — *Of its Religious Bearings.*

I. There is no need of multiplying words to show that the Unknowable, which has been elaborated as a sort of positive conception, is not in any sense a scientific idea. What lies outside the knowable cannot be scientific. Science is founded on the orderly conception of phenomena. It is confined by the very conditions of its existence within the limits of the knowable. Science has to do only with the finite and relative, and not with the infinite and absolute. It cannot be made by any sort of logical or psychological manipulation to extend farther for any purpose; for, whenever this limit is passed, it is no longer science, but something else. So far from the infinite and absolute, as applied to the Unknowable, being scientific concepts, or the legitimate product of such concepts, science has no power to give them even the remotest recognition. The Unknowable as an Absolute Something is the filmy product of metaphysical speculation, and between such speculation and science there is no common ground on which to stand. And since the basis of science is simply in the known and knowable, if it is ever reconciled with religion, it must be upon precisely this basis and no other.

2. No more is the Unknowable a religious idea. So far from this being the case, religion could not recognize it as its basis without abnegation of its essential character — without ceasing to be religion. It is true that the religious may recognize the limits of the knowable, and may find in that borderland a congenial field for the cultivation of humility and awe; but this is a very different thing from recognizing what lies beyond these limits as the essential basis of religion. To recognize the limits of the knowable is to recognize a truth, and it is religious so to do; but no more religious than to recognize certain other truths. The mystery of the Unknowable is no recommendation of it to religion. It is not within the province of religion to discover and formulate mysteries; that is the function of philosophy. We have made the issue that it is not science, but philosophy, that deals with the Unknowable; and we here make the issue that it is not religion, but philosophy, that recognizes this transcendent mystery. We think it an error in the one case not to discriminate between science and speculation, and, in the other case, not to discriminate between religion and speculation. An additional error, we believe, is the assumption that intellectual or conscious mystery is a necessary element of religion. Religion has no direct use for an unknown something in which it cannot have what it regards as faith so sure that it is equivalent to practical knowledge. Mystery is dead to religion till it becomes a living thing by revelation; and the Unknowable has no revelations.

3. There is one feature so prominent in all the religions of the world, past and present, as to be quite unmistakable; and that is the absence of doubt in the confidence of faith. No ideas have been held so tenaciously and confidently as what are called religious ideas. No such bitter wars have been waged as religious wars. It is true that religious people have frequently spoken of the inconceivable in connection with religion, and to this fact Mr. Spencer calls attention; but this pertains to the exaggeration and adulation with which Deity is spoken of and to, and, beyond this exaggeration of statement and adulation of worship, the connection of religion with mystery has little vital significance. Mystery cannot be regarded as having a substantial value in religion, since it is the confidence of knowing that underlies all systems of religion, and imparts to them their animus and vi-

ality. Acknowledged mystery is a product of science, of knowledge, of philosophy; and, so far as it has had to do with religion, it has been an accompaniment simply, and not an essential part of it. We may see the mysteries, and point them out, and call them by their right names, but religious devotees have rarely seen and rarely acknowledged them, and never as devotees, but only as philosophers; while in their religious observances they have acted upon a confidence of understanding which totally ignores the inscrutable as an essential part of religion.

The fetish worshipper acts upon the confidence of absolutely knowing. The savage believes his goblins to be as real as the warriors he meets in battle, or the game he overtakes in the chase. He is confident of the will and power of his fetiches to do him harm, and he endeavors, in such manner as he thinks effectual, to placate them. We see mystery in the idea of conjuring with plants, trees, rocks, images, or spirits, to turn aside the evil they would do; but the fetish worshipper sees nothing of the kind. In his consciousness all this is as positive knowledge. And, when we come to religious systems in which generalization had taken place, and the gods were less numerous and more representative in character, we find the same assurance of knowing. The polytheist knows to all intents and purposes that the deities in his pantheon are real entities, and have control of the phenomena of the world. Whether it was in consulting oracles, in watching the aspect of the stars, or taking omens from the flight of birds or the entrails of beasts, the devotee was troubled with never a doubt. If an army was in peril, and the moon became eclipsed, it could not march for superstitious dread, though by not marching it should be utterly cut to pieces. For a like reason, the most warlike State in Greece failed to be present to share in the glories of Marathon. Alexander, "the conqueror of the world," and a disciple of Aristotle, disputes with his general about the interpretation to be given an omen from the flight of an eagle, never doubting that the gods had sent the bird to manifest their will. The same certainty of knowing lies at the base of the monotheist's religious observances. We should only have to quote Mr. Spencer to show what familiarity with the objects of their worship religious people have professed; but he characterizes it as the impiety of the pious. We must protest against this

charge of impiety; it is valid only on a factitious basis which ignores the plainest teachings of religious manifestation, whether in history or among living peoples.

In all the systems of the world we find mystery intimately associated with religion, for the simple reason that in the earlier stages of mental development there was no conception of mystery as distinct from knowledge. Human experience had found no difference between them; they had not been mentally differentiated the one from the other. All things were really mysterious; the rising and setting of the sun, the tumult of the waters, the thunder of the heavens, the rush of the storm, were all even more mysterious than the motives which impelled the gods. The conception of things inconceivable as distinct from things conceivable had no place till after mankind had made considerable progress in intellectual development. It was then a differentiated product of thought; and, until it had birth, it could have nothing to do with religion, although religion had long previously been in existence. It was not till an age of philosophy was reached that an altar was raised to "the Unknown God."

Mystery has all along accompanied religion, because little was known of Nature, and very absurd things were assumed to be true. The mysteries in religious systems constitute the "obverse side" of the prevalent ignorance of Nature. As the knowledge of Nature has increased, the sacred absurdities have retreated. And it is because these misconceptions of Nature have been regarded as sacred that what is called, by a figure of speech, religion, opposes the progress of science and scientific philosophy, contesting every foot of the ground, and retreating only when compelled to. It is not, however, a battle between science and religion, as it has been erroneously called; it is a fight between science and misconceptions of the order of Nature, which have the odor of sanctity only from their association with religion; and the battle will not end till the fundamental ignorance which makes such misconceptions possible shall have been extirpated. This will in no wise act to the prejudice of religion, which, by its divorce from such misconceptions, absurdities, and mysteries, will become more firmly established as a ruling element of the human mind.

In his philosophy of the Unknowable, Mr. Spencer insists upon

the religious character which is necessarily involved in the vague conception of that which underlies phenomena. Religion inheres in the mystery. But, if the view we have presented be correct, there is the fundamental error in this philosophy of mistaking an accident of religion for religion itself, or, more accurately, mistaking a non-essential accompaniment of religion for an essential constituent. It is by association that we have come to regard mystery as an essential part of religion, since in religious observances appeal has always been made to what we call mysterious beings. So far as this has become organized in the mind with religion, it corresponds in some measure to the change which, according to Mr. Spencer, the property instinct has undergone. This instinct originated in connection with the uses of property, but in the course of time became transferred from current use to permanent possession. Now we are apt to mistake the love of gain for the original faculty, just as we mistake the love of mystery for the original motive of religion.

If, then, mystery is not an essential ingredient of religion and that which affords it its sanctions, in what shall we find the real character of religion and the nature of its sanctions? This is the vital point to be determined.

4. In all stages of human evolution mankind have proposed to themselves to profit by their religious rites and observances—to benefit themselves both individually and socially. How benefit themselves? By appealing to a power which is able to control events, and which is itself so constituted that man may influence and induce it to pursue a given course of action. The end proposed is human good here, or hereafter, or both; in any case it is some form of good to the worshipper. The object proposed in the observance of religious rites is to induce the power which controls events to do the things which the worshipper wishes to have done—to do him good in some form, however vague his conception of that good may be. These are the two sides of the essential element to be found in all religions: the power of the deities to affect man's destiny, and man's power to induce them to affect it favorably.

Some people confine their religion entirely to good during present life, such as the most uncultured peoples of all times, and the ancient Jews before they learned the doctrine of immortality

from the Persians. And then there are different methods of inducing these mysterious but competent powers to do what is desired. Sometimes they are threatened, and their images abased, to bring them to terms; but usually something is done to put the power, which is always anthropomorphic, into good humor with the devotee; praise, adulation, presents, sacrifices, and the like, are the effective methods. The barbarian who sacrificed an ox to "make God glad very much, and do Krooman good" illustrated the philosophy of religion better than is done in whole volumes of theology. Expressions of gratitude for favors received came at length to assume more distinct form. Further on, morality becomes closely united with religion. To visit the widows and the fatherless and to have charity are authoritatively set forth as quite indispensable to the complete religious character. A nation is cursed for the sin of slavery, and blessed for its devotion to freedom. But all these and other accessories cluster around the two sides of the central principle of religion; (1) to procure blessings (2) by moving competent powers to bestow them. The savage will juggle for the divine favor; the cultivated devotee, in addition to prayer and praise, will endeavor to do right toward his fellow-man.

The utilitarian origin and character which we have here ascribed to primitive religion and its subsequent developments may appear to many out of keeping with the present known character of religion. The facts and authorities to sustain this view cannot be given here, and we will only add that in this respect the moral and religious faculties of the mind fall into the same category. In his chapter on the "Genesis of Man, Morally," Mr. Fiske very clearly and conclusively points out the utilitarian origin of man's moral nature, together with the modifications which it has undergone, and in consequence of which moral purposes of an exalted character, without utilitarian objects directly in view, come at length to control human action. So religion, often individual and selfish in its ends, has yet organized into the mental constitution a spirit of self-sacrifice and aspiration which lifts it into the heroism of worthful doing. Since the two preceding paragraphs, which were written three years ago, and probably suggested by the works of Waitz, Lubbock, Tyler, and others, were incorporated in this essay, the

writer has had the pleasure of reading Dr. Brinton's very suggestive work on "The Religious Sentiment, its Source and Aim." Precisely the same utilitarian origin of religion is there given. The wish, the thwarting of this wish, the power that thwarts it, the attempt to placate that power, are elements of the problem. We quote only this passage: "By some means to guard against this undefined marplot to the accomplishment of his wishes, is the object of his religion. Its primitive forms are therefore defensive and conciliatory."

We have now reached in a more concrete form the reason why mystery has been so closely allied with religion. Simply because mankind supposed that Nature was regulated by beings of mystery, and that the way to procure the blessings desired was to act upon these beings by means of rites and ceremonies involving awe and mystery. Science has been taking the animus out of the mysteries by showing that what the religious supposed to be done by supernatural will in caprice, is done by natural force in regular sequence. In order to emphasize the value of mystery, Mr. Fiske affirms that mankind will not worship an object which stands in the light of science; but he does not state that the reason why this is so is because the light thus shed upon the object of devotion would show that it is without the power to do what had been previously supposed its appropriate function to do. Through this process man's views of religion have been already modified to a great degree. Prayer and fasting are no longer regarded as potent means of improving a bad season or abating an epidemic. Knowledge has compelled this change, and it will compel still others in the same direction. The history of the reconciliation of religious dogmas with science shows that the reconciliation has always been effected by the abdication of the dogmas. Astronomy, geology, physiology, and all the rest, have abated not one jot of their claims to bring about reconciliation with sanctified myths; and so it always will be. It is the religious associations of thought that must undergo the process of modification to adapt it to the modified state of knowledge. Then what is the ultimate form which religion will take? It will still contemplate as its end the procuring of blessings to mankind, and it will, as ever, appeal for this purpose to the powers which are deemed able to confer them. Intelligence

will prevent the expectation of impossible things, and the absurdity of trying to obtain any thing from inadequate powers will be abandoned. Religion then will confine itself to the use of rational means for the improvement of the conditions of life and the elevation of man as an individual and social being. And, since the appeal to mythical beings is no longer regarded as rational, the seemingly intimate connection of religion with mystery and non-knowing will be broken; consequently, religion will not recognize the "Unknowable." We must think that Mr. Spencer's cardinal error consists in mistaking the drift of religious development in the course of which religion becomes separated from ignorance and mystery and united with science. The religion of the future will become incorporated in the knowable as that which imparts to it the will to save.

Now, there is nothing affecting the uncultured devotee for good or evil but the activities of the natural world; consequently, the effective powers which he tries to influence by his religious observances are all comprehended within the knowable as legitimate subjects of science. The natural forces do what he supposes his divinities do, and the forces do by law what the divinities are supposed to do by changeable will. If we could throw the light of science upon the mind of a barbarian, and modify his emotions on the basis of correct thinking, his deities would vanish, and he would attempt to accomplish, by availing himself of the laws of phenomena, what he had before attempted to accomplish by conjuring with his goblins. Under this view of the subject religion does not abdicate its practical character, as it must under Mr. Spencer's views.

Oersted says poetically that "the laws of Nature are the thoughts of God!" By continuing the figure, we may add that in obeying the laws of Nature we are acting in harmony with the "thoughts of God." If the phenomenal proceed from the "Unknowable," we perform our duty in this regard by studying the phenomenal, and putting ourselves as far as possible in harmony with its laws. But this is the injunction of science; thus does religion fall within the province of science, and has nothing directly to do with the Unknowable as such. We are not bound to the Unknowable by the obligation of any duty which is not completely fulfilled by studying the world within

and the world without, and putting the one as far as possible in harmony with the other. It is no compliment to religion consciously to relegate it to the region over which must now and for ever brood the great impenetrable cloud of hopeless non-knowing. Religion always has been eminently practical, and it always will be.

5. What is the practical character of the religion which is to cluster around, or crystallize about, the Unknowable? We can imagine philosophers standing abstract and silent, like Socrates in the Grecian camp, and contemplating with a wonder and awe that is truly religious the mysterious void which lies beyond the knowable; but the world will never take to such quintessence of religion as this. It must be something practical, something to enlist the sympathies and satisfy the emotions. The most liberal forms of anthropomorphic religion teach us the Fatherhood of God. The Unknowable is a cold abstraction, and has no Fatherhood in it. It is equally beyond the reach of humanitarian emotion, of light-giving science, and of practical life. What kind of cultus would form about this "Cosmic God?" There would be no sacrifices, for we could not know so well as the ancients that the ascending savor would be pleasing. No prayer; for it is not possible to tell whether this is or is not a "prayer-hearing and a prayer-answering God." No praise; for we are not sure that this is a personal Deity, or, if he were, that he would be pleased with adulation. For the same reason the Unknowable cannot be wrought into the perfect ideal of religious aspiration. The trouble is there can be no revelation of this Unknowable, except what we get out of ourselves and the phenomenal world around us by close observation and hard thinking. But these are the methods of science, and the revelation resolves itself into science; and obedience to revelation becomes obedience to the laws which science evolves; and religion becomes one with science, culture, and well-doing. With all men as "with the scientific philosopher, loyalty to the truth" should be "the first principle of religion."

The Unknowable is destitute of such sanction as religion always has required and always will require. The great sanction of primitive man's religion is that, if the conjuring is not performed, the deities will do him harm. Further on, the sanction

is that, if the vows are not paid and the ceremonials observed, the deities will refuse to do us good, and will abandon us to evil. In this new conception of religion as simple mystery wrapped up with the Unknowable, there are no such sanctions. In the religion of science there are. Disobedience to the law brings penalty, and obedience brings the greatest possible happiness. Mr. Spencer attempts no practical application of his system of religion; Mr. Fiske does. I eagerly read his chapter on "Religion as Adjustment" to discover in what way his cosmical theism is to subserve the ends of religion. I felt the assurance of solid ground beneath when I found him resolving religion into the fulfillment of duty as revealed to us by the highest attainable knowledge of ourselves and of the phenomenal world. To the phenomenal as interpreted by science he goes reverently for the laws of religion and their sanctions; and this leaves his cosmical theism as completely destitute of a religious function as if it were merely a theoretical figure-head or a philosophical toy. He declares that, "from a scientific point of view, sin is a wilful violation of a law of Nature;" that it is "by bringing the whole subject into the philosophical domain wherein the law of evolution holds sway, that we begin to understand, so far as it is possible to understand, the philosophy of evil, pain, and wrong;" that it is science which affords authoritative sanction to well-doing; that, so far from its being the function of an inscrutable power to afford these sanctions, all we know of such power is a conclusion of science, showing that in the author's view theistic conceptions even, and all our conceptions of practical religion, have no other warrant than that which is derived from the knowable. We commend the sixteen pages ending on page 468 to the reader's careful attention. Mr. Fiske's reflection against the "irreligion" and "non-religion" of certain views is cast in the anthropomorphic spirit, and should never have been made by him. He has himself landed religion where every consistent evolutionist must land it — within the domain of science.

The drawback is that there is a want of consistency in the treatment of the subject. By the juxtaposition of affirmations to be found in the exposition of Cosmical Theism, we may be the better able to appreciate their character and their relations to one another.

The Divine Power in the universe is hopelessly inscrutable and unknowable, and consequently there can be no revelation of it; yet there is a revelation of it. Since all our knowledge is derived from experience, this Power is inscrutable because it lies beyond experience. The Noumenon, or Cause of phenomena, is one and the same with the Inscrutable Power; and, though we do not know whether this power is physical or spiritual, or what kind of an impersonality it is, — although in fact we know nothing about it, — nevertheless, we do know that it is infinite and absolute. The Cause of phenomena is infinite and absolute, and the phenomena finite and relative. The Cause and the effects are here so totally unlike that the latter cannot be a revelation of the former; nevertheless, they are such a revelation; and that is the reason the sanctions of religion which are derived from the domain of science are to be set down to the credit of Cosmic Theism. What we thus learn of those sanctions on the side of experience is to be placed to the credit of that side with which experience can have nothing whatever to do. A fraud is committed on the philosophical rights of experience for the benefit of the cosmic conception of Deity, which is discreetly planted in the region of the Unknowable, where it shall never be disturbed hereafter. This conception, or mental action, which is planted, not within the pale of experience, but outside of it in the region of the Unknowable, is calmly spoken of, as if it were a legitimate, and not a miraculous, conception. Finally, the Cosmic Philosophy is based on the affirmation of God's existence; but it is also based on the phenomenal, on physical truths, on the Doctrine of Evolution. The Cosmical Philosophy is, therefore, a sort of biped, standing with one foot on Cosmic Theism, and the other on the truths of science.

Rather than such a medley of incongruous ideas and pseud-ideas as these, would it not be far more truly religious, as well as more truly philosophical, reverently to acknowledge, even as Comte has done, our total incompetency to deal with what lies beyond experience? Mr. Fiske nevertheless uses terms to designate the Unknowable, which the originator of the doctrine has not used. If the terms "Divine Being" and "Cosmical God" are not absolutely anthropomorphic, they so distinctly connote it that it would be easy to fit them with the anthropomorphic

habiliments. The tendency of this metaphysical myth toward anthropomorphic degeneracy has already shown itself. It will be easy for future disciples, by the same kind of logical latitude which the entire philosophy of the Unknowable permits, to show that it must be accepted as anthropomorphic to account for the evolution of intelligent beings. Mr. Fiske has already affirmed that we are rather to regard it as a spiritual, or quasi-physical, Power. It is true that in a previous chapter he sweeps away anthropomorphism with a masterly hand; but it is not to be expected that an evolutionist with anthropomorphic theism organized into his mental habitudes will take any such view of it, while he will find in Mr. Fiske's concessions sufficient encouragement to advance cosmic theism in the direction of animistic theology. Mr. Fiske's assertion that "our cosmic philosophy is based upon the affirmation of God's existence" would be to most theologians a confession of anthropomorphism. We will give in a general way the progress which this terminology of the Unknowable has made under the handling of the masters. The first series is what we suppose would be allowable to philosophy proper; the second is from Mr. Spencer; the third is from Mr. Fiske:—

1. Unknowable realities; unknown reality; noumena; transfigured realism; absolute existence; the unknowable.
2. The Unknowable; Noumenon; Inscrutable Power; Ultimate Reality; Absolute Reality; Absolute Existence; Absolute Being.
3. Divine Power; Supreme Power; Infinite Power; Divine Being; Cosmic Theism; Deity; God; Cosmical God.

Is there not in this an obvious drifting toward anthropomorphic degeneracy?

Mr. Fiske insists upon providing in the religion of the future for the mystery-loving element in the nature of man. This he thinks will be done by postulating a Divine Power in the region of the Unknowable, where the mystery must remain well-nigh absolute. We are not so sure that the religious nature of man will exact any such theological element for its satisfaction. A few hundred years since religious people would no more have thought of giving up their belief in witchcraft than they would have thought of giving up their belief in Satan, the great Adversary

of man. But religious people have given up witchcraft without apparently suffering from the loss; and now they are rapidly giving up their belief in a personal devil, no longer feeling that it is a necessary element of religion. And we go further, and affirm that the religious element of the human mind will be strengthened rather than weakened when every form of mythical and metaphysical mystery shall be displaced by the best attainable knowledge of things. It is only a little while since that all religious contemplation rested upon the assumption that not law, but the will of an anthropomorphic Being, directed all the details of Nature and of life. This has rapidly passed away, and the belief has taken its place that events occur in orderly succession by the natural relations of cause and effect which no power ever sets aside. It is upon the substantial basis of such relation that wrong doing is punished, and well doing rewarded; and herein do religion and morality find their sanctions. All that we know of Deity and religion we have learned from the activities within and around us; and it is here that the omnipresent and ever-living God is. This view, which science establishes, is gradually taking the place of the mythical. There are at this moment thousands of intelligent, earnest, religious men whose rationality has put all mythical phantoms to flight, and who are happy in the riddance. The human mind is accommodating in such things, though for the most part it moves slowly. While early teaching in the family and in Sabbath Schools continues to fix the myths in the mind at a period of life which insures their permanency in all minds of a certain cast, the change towards scientific views of religion must be very greatly retarded. To reach this scientific phase, religion has necessarily to undergo considerable change; but not so much as it would have to undergo on the Spencerian theory; since, under the scientific aspect, it would still retain essentially its code of practical duty and its sanction of right doing, while, by making the Unknowable its object and incentive, it would lose the sanctions of law and all practical character. In the one case the change would be evolution; in the other, revolution.

The change which religious ideas would have to undergo on the principles herein designated, and which is actually taking place, would be less than the change which political ideas have

undergone within a very brief period of modern history. And what is further to be noted is that these two changes, the political and religious, take the same general direction. It is not long since governmental authority was supposed to reside by divine right in an hereditary ruler; now the notion of the divine in heredity is totally abandoned, and political authority is held to be derived from the consent of the governed. It is well to think of our obligations to the past, but it is very easy to make too much of such a consideration, and thus pervert merit into demerit.

The two authors named at the head of this article are among those whose contributions to the aggregate of knowledge I most appreciate and value. I am wholly in sympathy with their great work on the philosophy of the knowable; and I must be permitted to think that in this, and not in their treatment of the religious features of the Unknowable, are to be found their real contributions to the basis of religion, and the genuine evidences of their devotion to religion. The scientific people of our age, — those who pursue knowledge for its own sake and accept it upon its own merits, — all those who do, to the best of their ability, what they believe, to the best of their judgment, to be worthy work, — all such are truly religious, whatever their attitude toward the dogmas and myths. All along the centuries there have been persons whose mental vision has pierced through the illusion of the myths, and they have always been deemed irreligious, when they were in truth the most religious of men. There is so much to learn wherein the whole mind may expand, and so much to do upon the knowable basis for the various forms of human good, that there is some warrant for believing that the ends of religion are better subserved by labor in this field than by energy expended in pushing the ultimate of religious regard into the far off abyss of the Unknowable.

J. STAHL PATTERSON.

PREACHER'S LOVE-VACATION.

RING, village bells, but not for me;
You are not rapping at my door,
But at my neighbor's, the church-goer,
Who prinks, and primly spells
The impending litany;
And maids break into every hue
That turns to a parterre the pew.
There's not a house cannot afford
Some tag to bring before the Lord,
And when the priest would offer to His name,
On hundred hearts a hundred bonnets flame.

No ringing can decoy my morn;
The air transfers each stroke with scorn;
The meeting house has been unroofed,
So long to daller blasts well-proofed;
The pulpit crumbles, frescoes fly,
Exhales the organ with a sigh;
Of hymn or bible not a trace,
But out-of-doors fills all the place.

Hear that carol in the elm,
While the branches dip and sway
To its pith as to a helm, —
Unto both the joy's the day.
All the week the earth has rolled
This hush of Sunday to unfold;
Whirling of a million wheels,
Jar, recoil, and sweat, and grime,
Clashes of the laborers' steels
Forged this silence, built this clime,
Raised this morning temple, free
For worship by this bird and me.