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Herbert Spencer

His Life, Writings, and Philosophy



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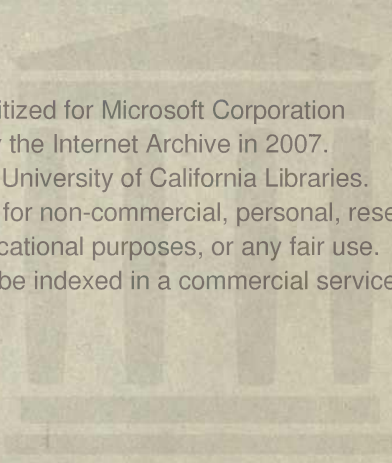
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VOL. I.]

Modern Science Essayist,

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Herbert Spencer.

HIS LIFE, WRITINGS, AND PHILOSOPHY.

BY

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"THE RELIGIOUS SENTIMENTS OF THE HUMAN MIND," ETC.



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COLLATERAL READINGS SUGGESTED

IN CONNECTION WITH ESSAY I.

Biographical Sketch of Herbert Spencer, by Professor E. L. Youmans (in *Popular Science Monthly*, March, 1876); *Essays on Spencer*, in *Popular Science Monthly*, November, 1874, and *North American Review*, October, 1879, by Professor Youmans; *Spencer's Reconciliation of Religion and Science*, by Professor Youmans (in *Christian Examiner*, May, 1862); *Spencer's Education, Study of Sociology, Essays, and Recent Discussions*.

MM



HERBERT SPENCER.*

As THE world grows older it knows more about its greatest men and finds them out quicker; but in order to be noticed it is necessary for them to be greater than in former times. The idea that men of long ago were of superior mould and larger intellectual stature than those of to-day is a false one, though useful, no doubt, to sustain the doctrine of a lapse from an originally perfect state. Those sentiments which have given rise to and supported the theory of monarchical sovereignty made demigods of military chieftains, of kings and emperors, and endowed them, in the minds of people generally, with all the virtues which they did not possess but which seemed to be necessary to a properly equipped great man. The same method has pervaded the world of study and of letters. Plato and Aristotle have been esteemed much greater men than any of our degenerate times, and there has been, and still is, a mystical value attached to their least words.

Without disparaging these really worthy Greeks, who would be considered good philosophers, as philosophers go in our time, and who, it must be remembered, were far better than they used to run in earlier days, I do not hesitate to aver that the subject of this sketch, for instance, is much greater than either of them. Nor would I say it of him alone, but also of many others, who are not as prominent. The general level of intellectual power is so far raised in modern times that it is exceedingly difficult for any one man to become pre-eminent among his fellows. His limitations are more accurately measured, his weaknesses are detected, and he has none of the divine halo about his head that used to awe people into adoration and out of criticism. Believe me, the modern way is the best. These are more fortunate times, when we see Carlyle's "Great Man" certainly disappearing from the earth and soon to share the fate of the mastodon and the mammoth. True greatness

* COPYRIGHT, by D. G. Thompson, 1888.

will be a natural, not a supernatural, greatness. Those below will be raised up, and the model man of the future will be he who walks modestly among his fellows, claiming nothing and needing to claim nothing, because his intellect, his character, his deeds shine in their true light, neither obscured nor artificially heightened. And of such there will be many.

It is still hard for merit to obtain recognition; but if a man does good work, and chances to live in one of the most enlightened countries of the world, he will probably be found out before he dies. Mr. Spencer had a long struggle before much attention was paid to him, but at length his reward came. One great difficulty in his case was the lack of a thorough academical education. By no means the least of the advantages of a collegiate or university course is that the student is admitted into a society of scholars, who will form the intellectual aristocracy of their generation. He who joins them becomes known to the others, is established as a member of the guild, and wears his badge to the end of life. Both recognition and honor come to him more easily, by virtue of his membership, to say nothing of the advantages of the courses of study and discipline in themselves. At the age of thirteen Herbert Spencer went to live with his uncle, the Rev. Thomas Spencer, Rector of Hinton, who was a graduate of Cambridge. The uncle wished Herbert to prepare for the university, but the latter was obstinate and refused. Prof. Youmans remarks that the uncle lived to acknowledge that Herbert probably took the right view of the matter. I do not think he did. Mr. Spencer's thoughts and writings seem to me to show their main deficiency in precisely those things which a university training would have supplied. Many of his friends, however,—it is fair to state,—believe that a university training was incompatible with the traits on which the development of his philosophy depended.

Herbert Spencer was born in Derby, April 27, 1820. His father and grandfather were teachers, and Herbert, at three years of age, was the only surviving child. He did not learn to read until seven. He was delicate in health, and was not pressed. When he did go to school, he was not brilliant. Prof. Youmans says of him that "he was characterized as backward in things requiring memory and recitation, but as in advance of the rest in intelligence." He

never got along well with languages, but was excellent in geometry, in physics, and in drawing, both mechanical and free-hand. At the age of sixteen he taught school for three months, with good success. Immediately after this, he entered upon a year's engagement under Sir Charles Fox, then engineer for the construction of the London and Birmingham Railway. This was succeeded by eighteen months' similar service in connection with the Birmingham and Gloucester Railway. From 1841 to 1850 he was occupied with private studies; now and then with engineering engagements, to some extent upon mechanical inventions, in one or two political movements, in the writing and publication of various papers, and finally as sub-editor of the *Economist*. In 1850 he published "Social Statics," his first important work, but one with which he was so much dissatisfied afterward that he tried to suppress it.

✓ From 1850 to 1855, a number of essays were completed,—"The Theory of Population," "The Development Hypothesis," "Over-Legislation," "The Universal Postulate," and others. In 1855 the "Principles of Psychology" was finished, and it was in the writing of this that the author arrived at the conviction that the law of evolution was universal in its applications. The labor of preparing the Psychology, carried on without due attention to hygienic rules as to diet and exercise, was sufficient to break down his health. His nervous system was so disordered that he could do no work for eighteen months. This, however, did not prevent his active mind from elaborating a scheme which grew more definite day by day. He came to believe that the law of evolution should be made the basis of philosophy, and to devise the plan of a system established thereon. As his health improved, he prepared to devote his entire life to such a work, and in 1860 he published the prospectus of his philosophical system, as we have it to-day, laying out a task of twenty years, which ill-health has prolonged to the present time and which is still unfinished. ✓

If to what has been said we add that Mr. Spencer, while engaged in his great work, has lived a quiet life in London, with occasional vacations, often on account of illness, during one of which he made a trip to Egypt and during another a voyage to America, we shall have substantially his biography—the uneventful existence of a student who saw what was in him to do, planned his course, and fol- ✓

lowed it steadily to the exclusion of everything else. (The history of his personal life may be told in a paragraph; but who shall write the history of his books? Who can measure the influence they have already exercised upon human thought and action, and who will venture to predict the limit of their power?)

It is not to be wondered at, perhaps, that social advancement involves antagonisms, since the whole process of evolution throughout nature is one of action and resistance. This is a law of social as well as physical existence. But it does seem a little remarkable that, where antagonism occurs, the interest of men is aroused in proportion to its violence. They are a great deal more observant of destruction than of constructive results. The lightning and thunder command attention, while the sun which is the life of all, sustaining all things, and upon which evolution for our planet is dependent, is scarcely considered. The "warlord," who distinguishes himself by killing his fellows, and shows prowess in battle, is the prominent figure in what is called history, while he who has moulded the opinions and conduct of men occupies an inferior position. Even in the life of a scholar like Mr. Spencer, it is his collisions with other people, prominent representatives of other schools, that make his reputation more than the still, silent work which is accomplished by the diffusion of the knowledge contained in his books, — though it extend from London to San Francisco, and in the other direction to the interior of Siberia, where George Kennan found copies of his writings, somewhat mutilated, indeed, by the Russian censor. But the power which secures the world's progress is assimilative, and, though conflict may be necessary to prepare the way, it is the silent and peaceful forces which, after all, convert the nations. The influence of the great philosopher, though he be not a conspicuous figure of the political or social life of his age, is pervasive, stimulating to activity, far-reaching in time, and works powerfully and effectively even where we are not able to trace it.

Mr. Spencer's writings met with neglect, and then condemnation. His systematic treatises were published at his own expense, and the original plan adopted was of a serial issued to subscribers. The publications did not pay, and their author was discouraged by the fact that they were

eating up his substance and bringing in nothing. The most important impulse toward success was given to them by our own countryman, Prof. Edward L. Youmans, who, as an English friend said to me, really discovered Spencer. This discovery was accomplished, as Prof. Youmans himself tells us, through reading the "Principles of Psychology." Of this, even he could make nothing at first, and he threw it aside with some impatience. But his sister, Miss Eliza A. Youmans, took up the discarded volume, read it with care, and told her brother that it was a new revelation in philosophy. In truth, then, we ought to say it was Miss Youmans who discovered Spencer. Her brother, however, soon came to realize the importance of the discovery, and did quite enough to vindicate his claim to a partner's share of the credit. He interested himself practically in promoting the circulation of Mr. Spencer's works. The Messrs. Appleton, through his efforts, took up their publication, and for the first time a character and standing were given to them, in some degree commensurate with their importance.

Little by little recognition came, until by-and-by it dawned upon the thinking world that Herbert Spencer was the foremost philosopher of his day. It is gratifying to know that, after a while, his books began to yield him an income (though by no means a large one), and this is the case at the present time.*

Mr. Spencer is a bachelor. Evidently he has had no time to get married. He was not, however, a recluse, till obliged to be by the exigences of his work and the necessity of caring for his health. In 1879 I missed the pleasure of meeting him at a dinner party, because, as he wrote, he had engaged to take two ladies to the opera that evening. Observe that he took *two* ladies; he knew how to protect himself; it is a mistake to suppose that philosophers are never practical! He has always entered into social life as

* It is a mistake to suppose that Mr. Spencer was ever in a condition of poverty. He saw, however, that his expenditures for the publication of his works would necessarily soon exhaust his means, and was distressed, not on account of immediate wants, but with the prospect of having to abandon his cherished undertaking. The exact circumstances of the rendering of American assistance for the completion of his works were set forth in a letter written by Prof. Youmans to the *New York Tribune*, in June, 1872. About \$7000 was raised by American friends for this purpose. The amount was accepted by Mr. Spencer, "as a trust to be used for public ends," and was employed chiefly to defray the expenses attendant upon the compilation of the tables of the "Descriptive Sociology."

much as he could without interfering with his work, and has been a welcome and an agreeable guest in many households.

His most regular associations of this sort have been at the Athenæum Club, which is instituted, in the language of its constitution, "for the association of individuals known for their scientific or literary attainments, artists of eminence in any class of fine arts, and noblemen and gentlemen distinguished as liberal patrons of science, literature or the arts." The Athenæum gives the privileges of its home to such non-residents as its Committee of Invitation may select, for the period of their sojourn in London. If I may be pardoned personal references, it was my good fortune to be honored with this limited membership at one time, and, happening to be writing home to a gentleman who was an editor, I mentioned various items regarding my stay in London, among others my frequenting the Athenæum. To offset any possible suggestion to his mind that I spoke of this from motives of vanity, I put in my letter, with the proper quotation-marks and exclamation-point, the jocosely remark of an English friend in describing the Club, that it was "composed of distinguished people at home and less-distinguished people from abroad." I think my correspondent must have been of Scotch ancestry: but, whatever may have been his pedigree, my feelings may be imagined when I afterwards saw, in my friend's paper, a paragraph setting forth seriously, and without the quotation-marks and exclamation-point, that "Mr. D. G. Thompson had been elected a member of the Athenæum in London, a Club which is composed of distinguished people at home and less-distinguished people from abroad"!

The Athenæum includes people of all sorts of opinions. Men are there of as wide differences in religion as are exemplified in Cardinal Manning and Frederick Harrison; or in politics as in Lord Salisbury, Earl Selborne and Joseph Chamberlain. It naturally follows, especially when we consider that the membership of the Club is twelve hundred, that social intercourse within its pale lies in groups formed according to affiliations proceeding from sympathies in ideas, or in work. Mr. Spencer's friends are chiefly those in scientific or philosophical pursuits, among whom Huxley and Tyndall are the most intimate. It is his usual habit to visit the Club-house every day about three o'clock. Al-

though the library and study rooms afford facilities for work he rarely uses them for that purpose, his hours at the Club being devoted to relaxation and recreation. Billiards constitute his favorite amusement, and he generally is found, with his coat off, in the room assigned for that sport, when the visitor sends the hall-boy to seek him. Whether he plays well, or ill, I do not know; but such men are not apt to make a failure of anything they attempt, and it is creditable to be excellent in billiards if one chooses to play the game. Besides, if one is able to win, it is usually a saving of expense!

Mr. Spencer is a ready conversationalist, very accurate and exact in his expressions. As Dr. Hooker once said to Professor Youmans, "He talks like a book." This characteristic does not strike one as pedantry, and is by no means unpleasant, though it puts the interlocutor on his guard respecting carelessness in his own words. He is at home on all topics of current interest, as well as on those specially appertaining to his studies. He is a keen critic, but not censorious, nor does he seem to entertain or cherish animosities. Nevertheless he is very combative; too much so for his own good. He is fond of striking back at his critics, and has more than once turned aside from his work to take notice of strictures upon his views, when there was little utility in so doing. His controversy with Frederick Harrison is a case in point. However interesting this may be to readers, it after all seems a waste of words. The position of neither thinker was made any clearer, nor was either converted by the other. Nor, I presume, was any one else converted by either, while much of Mr. Spencer's supremely valuable time was consumed in preparing the letters. The latter has that genuinely British trait of character which causes a man to stand up for his rights, and to resist what he deems aggression. Prof. Youmans says he was a disobedient boy sometimes, and that he never would stand bullying at school. No more will he stand it in the journals and reviews. His sensitiveness to invasions upon his personality subjected him to sore trials upon his visit to America. Prof. Youmans, however, managed him well, and was a happy mediator between the sick man who wanted to be let alone, and the impatient public anxious to see and hear the philosopher they honored. The interviewer's attempts were disagreeable, persistence in proffered hospi-

tality on the part of new acquaintances was annoying; but what drove him nearly frantic was the desire of people, in some places manifested, to look at him as they would look at a fine animal at the agricultural fair. The culmination of this latter outrage was reached, I regret to say, in my native State,—at Burlington, Vermont, the home of Minister Phelps and Senator Edmunds. His arrival having been announced in the daily paper, quite a number of people called to pay their respects, and a little demonstration in his honor was threatened. Mr. Spencer however, tired and ill, had gone to his room, leaving orders that he could see no one and must not be disturbed. The people would not be appeased, and to his great horror a party of them went to his door, knocked, and, when it was opened, told him that they had come to see him and see him they would. His traveling companion remonstrated, but they were many and Mr. Spencer had no gun. They took their look and departed, but of conversation they had none. You may force a horse to the water, but you cannot make him drink. No wonder that, after this, Mr. Spencer came to entertain a fear respecting the permanency of our institutions, and to remark, concerning our people, "The American has not, I think, a sufficiently quick sense of his own claims, and, at the same time, as a necessary consequence, not a sufficiently quick sense of the claims of others,—for the two traits are organically related. I observe that you tolerate various small interferences and dictations which Englishmen are prone to resist. I am told that the English are remarked on for their tendency to grumble in such cases; and I have no doubt it is true."

"Do you think it worth while," asks the interviewer, "for people to make themselves disagreeable by resenting every trifling aggression? We Americans think it involves too much loss of time and temper, and doesn't pay."

"Exactly," replies Mr. Spencer; "that is what I mean by character. It is this easy-going readiness to permit small trespasses, because it would be troublesome or profitless, or unpopular to resist, which leads to the habit of acquiescence in wrong and the decay of free institutions."*

One time, at the Athenæum club, I was introduced by Mr. Spencer to Mr. Matthew Arnold, in the lunch-room. I

* "Herbert Spencer in America." D. Appleton & Co. 1883.

should like to have been at the next table when, perchance, these two gentlemen might have sat down together and discussed America over a cut of roast mutton, a boiled potato, and a spoonful of peas for each, with a mug of stout and no napkin. I would forgive the newspaper reporter all his sins, against me at any rate, if only he could have been there and reported that conversation. Much would have been said that was true, doubtless; much would have been kindly. Much, also, would have been "curious"; nor do I imagine it would have been wanting in "distinction." At the very least it would have been "interesting."

I have noticed a remarkable characteristic of many Englishmen,—the readiness with which, at little and unaccustomed things, they fall into that state which is expressed by the word "aghast." It is chiefly with respect to affairs of personal life, in which they behold a difference of manners. Its first symptom is paralysis; then follows reasoning, from their own stupefaction, subjectively. Because the effect on them is great they magnify the cause. I meet my friend the Englishman one fine day in summer, and say to him, cheerily, "Very warm to-day. A good day for your annual bath." Straightway he is struck "aghast"; and thus he communes with himself: "Yes, quite so; but that is a very extraordinary expression; warm—yes; bath, yes, I know; but *annual* bath; what can he mean? He cannot think I bathe but once a year: he has seen the bath-tub which I always carry with my luggage. He had a kindly and genial smile when he said it. I really am not prepared to believe he meant to insult me. But how curious! I have it! It must be that there are many Americans who bathe only once a year. But, if so, how can they keep clean? It is very, very extraordinary. The Americans are a remarkable people; but their manner of address seems to me to be rather infelicitous, don't you know. And they have not yet learned how to live; if they had they would not postpone their bath so long. No, the Americans may have done measurably well in solving the political problem, but it must be allowed on all hands that they have not solved the human problem."

Mr. Spencer, however, is very different from the Englishman of the previous paragraph. He is far too thorough an observer to let his judgment of real conditions be determined by minor and adventitious circumstances. He is by

no means an obtuse or narrow man. His opinions respecting America were much more correct and substantial than those of Mr. Matthew Arnold. The latter never could get below the surface. His mind was critical, but not synthetic or constructive. With him, manners made the man; and there were no manners save his own. He was lacking in "lucidity." But Mr. Spencer's vision was wide, and his insight keen. He saw things in their true proportions, and his criticisms upon our country were received with respect and thankfulness.

It was in February, 1886, that I last saw Mr. Spencer. He had perceptibly aged, and appeared feeble. I did not tarry long, for I fancied conversation wearied him. As he took my hand at parting, he said, mournfully, "Tell Youmans you have seen me, that I have not much strength left, and I shall never see him again." What he had in mind was his own decease; but Prof. Youmans passed on to the majority before him. Since that day, we have reports of a long illness, from which he has partially recovered. There is small likelihood that the "System of Synthetic Philosophy" will ever be completed, but Mr. Spencer's energy is great and he will work as long as work is possible.

Turning, now, from the author to his productions, the first thing to be said—and it should be distinctly understood as incontrovertible—is that Herbert Spencer is the father of the modern philosophy of evolution. The impression still exists that Darwin is entitled to that honor. This is a mistake, which the application of the term "Darwinism" to that philosophy has helped to perpetuate. The "Origin of Species" was first published in November, 1859. Mr. Spencer's *Psychology*, it will be remembered, appeared in 1857. This last was preceded by several essays outlining the doctrine of evolution, the earliest of which dates from 1852. To one of these, "The Development Hypothesis," Mr. Darwin refers in the Introduction to the "Origin of Species." But the "Principles of Psychology," which is an integral part of Mr. Spencer's philosophy, and which exhibits the doctrine of evolution as it stands to-day, had been published two years before Darwin's first great work appeared.

This, however, is by no means all. In its subject-matter Evolution is not "Darwinism," but a natural law of much broader scope. The former shows that, universally through-

out nature, change is governed by a principle according to which there is a course of integration of forces from indefiniteness, simplicity, and homogeneity in their relations, to definiteness, complexity, and heterogeneity. When evolution, proceeding in this way, ceases, a reverse movement of dissolution begins. This law applies to inorganic and organic nature alike. Darwin's Natural Selection is an expression of the manner in which evolution accomplishes the development of vegetal and animal life, showing how species are formed, distributed, modified, perpetuated and destroyed.

It will thus be seen that, while Mr. Spencer thought out and presented the whole philosophy of evolution, Darwin's work was special and limited. That it was a great work I am certainly not disposed to deny, but I think we ought to understand exactly what it was. It cannot better be expressed than in an estimate by Geo. J. Romanes, published in *Nature*. "The few general facts out of which the theory of evolution by natural selection is formed, namely, struggle for existence, survival of the fittest, and heredity, were all previously well-known facts. . . . But the greatness of Mr. Darwin, as the reformer of biology, is not to be estimated by the fact that he conceived the idea of natural selection; his claim to everlasting memory rests upon the many years of devoted labor whereby he tested this idea in all conceivable ways—amassing facts from every department of science, balancing evidence with the soundest judgment, shirking no difficulty, and at last astonishing the world as with a revelation by publishing the completed proof of evolution. . . . In the chapter of accidents, therefore, it is a singularly fortunate co-incidence that Mr. Darwin was the man to whom the idea of natural selection occurred; for although, in a generation or two, the truth of evolution might have become more and more forced upon the belief of science, and with it the acceptance of natural selection as an operating cause, in our own generation this could only have been accomplished in the way that it was accomplished; we required one such exceptional mind as that of Darwin, to focus the facts and show the method."

Mr. Spencer's practical philosophy has been pretty fully set forth in his "Data of Ethics," and in his various essays. In ethics he holds that conduct should be estimated and governed by the rule of the highest utility, but believes that an ideal social state, involving an ideal development of

character, should always be kept before the mind as a standard, to furnish that "counsel of perfection" which his opponent, Green, urges as necessary though from an entirely different point of view. This ideal morality is likely to be realized in the course of evolution, but until there is reached such a state of society as to make it practicable we must also recognize a code of relative ethics by which to conform our actions to our circumstances, and aid, so far as those circumstances will allow, the progress of mankind to the most perfect conditions. This code will involve a varying compromise between egoism and altruism. Mr. Spencer thinks the antagonism between these two will eventually disappear, because the working of social forces must inevitably produce the result that men will increasingly find their happiness in the welfare of others. Their egoistic gratifications will become sympathetic. Their highest selfish delight will merely be the lust of making other people delighted. In a word, individual happiness will only be complete in the social happiness. Mr. Spencer is surely right in this view. We never can wholly eliminate self-regarding ends. Our own action must ultimately be directed to securing our own pleasure and preventing pain to ourselves. But it is quite possible for us to so form our characters that our highest pleasure is the pleasure and welfare of others; and in the measure that this is completely achieved is the conciliation between egoism and altruism perfected.

Our author's political philosophy is as radically individualistic as that of William von Humboldt. He believes in the minimum of government, and is uncompromisingly opposed to all the socialistic tendencies of the time. With the militant regimes of continental Europe he has no sympathy, and in the industrial combinations that seek to build up strong organizations for the purposes of domination and dictation he beholds an equally pernicious despotism. Mr. Spencer would no doubt be a Mugwump in politics anywhere. He would not support political machines, nor would he favor concentration or centralization of power. He carries to an extreme the *laissez-faire* doctrine. With him society is always "a growth, not a manufacture," and he deems that attempts at regulation beyond the necessities of security are obstructive of social progress, because they interfere with the natural growth which is the thing needed,

and which can only proceed from the exercise of individual spontaneity and freedom. X

This principle has been misapplied in one important particular, as it seems to me. Mr. Spencer's views of the limitation of the functions of government lead him to the notion that the State should have nothing to do with education, which, he thinks, should be accomplished entirely by private agency. Schools maintained by the public, and regulated by governmental administration, should be done away with. The fundamental mistake here is an error of omission. Those who hold these ideas fail to perceive that education is necessary as a measure of security. Though they may see that the root of all evil lies in the character of men, they do not appreciate that mere negative prohibition is not enough to secure that free and full development of individuals upon which they lay so much stress. There must be placed over human beings, in early life, such a discipline of the will and of the intellect as to develop the social in opposition to the selfish disposition. This is by far the most certain means of preserving the peace. And if the ideal of the perfect State be a community where there is little or no government, such an ideal can only be realized by the creation of a predominantly altruistic character in individuals. How, then, are we justified in saying, when we allow that government exists for the purpose of securing people in their freedom, that we ought to neglect those means which are evidently the most efficient for the desired end? For security's sake, therefore, the State ought to have a care for education, and maintain a system of public instruction and discipline.

There is little to find fault with in Mr. Spencer's notions of the general course which education ought to take. He asks the question, What knowledge is of most worth? and answers it according to a broad view of utilities. Those things which are directly necessary to self-preservation come first: then those indirectly ministering to this end, and to the full development of human nature. Physical, intellectual and moral education all have their place in proper proportions. The treatise on "Education" probably has been more widely read than any other of Mr. Spencer's writings, and it is likely to be regarded as a classic on that subject for a long time to come. It subordinates the æsthetic to

the scientific, but it concedes the value of the former as a supplement to scientific knowledge and training.

Mr. Spencer's religious views are readily discernible to any one who has read the "First Principles" of his philosophy. Supernatural revelations he rejects; but to say that his scheme has no place for religion would be a gross misstatement. He makes all nature dependent upon and the outcome of a Power which is not and cannot be known, but whose existence must ever be postulated. Toward this Power, faith may turn, but what it is must forever transcend our knowledge; and respecting its nature or attributes, those relating to personality included, no affirmations or denials can be made. This is strictly Agnostic doctrine, and it presents to us the famous "Unknowable," respecting which so much has been said.

If the term be used absolutely, "Unknowable" is not a proper characterization. To be able to affirm *that* it exists, implies some knowledge of it; and it is a contradiction to declare that anything which can be made an object of cognition is unknowable. In a relative sense, however, the term may be used to mean something existing, but beyond the reach of further objectification, or of cognition by human intelligence as we have experience of it. This, no doubt, is what Mr. Spencer intends. The true statement is that we know the existence of an Ultimate Reality which is known as such but not otherwise known.

Here is our philosopher's creed, in a passage from "First Principles": "Thus the consciousness of an Inscrutable Power, manifested to us through all phenomena, has been growing ever clearer; and must eventually be freed from its imperfections. The certainty that on the one hand such a Power exists, while on the other hand its nature transcends intuition and is beyond imagination, is the certainty towards which intelligence has from the first been progressing. To this conclusion science inevitably arrives as it reaches its confines; while to this conclusion religion is irresistably driven by criticism. And satisfying, as it does, the demands of the most rigorous logic at the same time that it gives the religious sentiment the widest possible sphere of action, it is the conclusion we are bound to accept without reserve or qualification."

Let us also note the following passages showing the true relationship of religion and science :

“In religion let us recognize the high merit that from the beginning it has dimly discerned the ultimate verity, and has never ceased to insist upon it. . . . From the first the recognition of this supreme verity, in however imperfect a manner, has been its vital element; and its various defects, once extreme but gradually diminishing, have been so many failures to recognize in full that which is recognized in part. The truly religious element of religion has always been good; that which has proved untenable in doctrine and vicious in practice has been its irreligious element: and from this it has been ever undergoing purification.

“And now observe that, all along, the agent which has effected the purification has been science. We habitually overlook the fact that this has been one of its functions. Religion ignores its immense debt to science: and science is scarcely at all conscious how much religion owes it. Yet it is demonstrable that every step by which religion has progressed from its first low conception to the comparatively high one it has now reached, science has helped it, or rather forced it, to take: and that even now science is urging further steps in the same direction. . . . Otherwise contemplating the facts, we may say that religion and science have been undergoing a slow differentiation; and that their ceaseless conflicts have been due to the imperfect separation of their spheres and functions. Religion has, from the first, struggled to unite more or less science with its nescience; science has, from the first, kept hold of more or less nescience as though it were a part of science. Each has been obliged gradually to relinquish that territory which it wrongfully claimed, while it has gained from the other that to which it had a right; and the antagonism between them has been an inevitable accompaniment of this process. . . . So long as the process of differentiation is incomplete more or less of antagonism must continue. Gradually, as the limits of possible cognition are established, the causes of conflict will diminish. And a permanent peace will be reached when science becomes fully convinced that its explanations are proximate and relative; while religion becomes fully convinced that the mystery it contemplates is ultimate and absolute.” (Part I., Chap. V.)

These, in barest outline, are some of the things that Herbert Spencer has begun to teach the human race. The fields of knowledge are wide, and many have been the la-

borers therein. We appreciate and admire the work of the scientist who increases the stock of human learning in any of its departments. Agassiz, Darwin, Huxley, Tyndall, Wallace, and all the host of them, awaken our gratitude and command our reverence. But though we have traveled much in these realms of gold,

“And many goodly states and kingdoms seen,”

profounder emotions are stirred when we contemplate Mr. Spencer and his work. We think no longer of the ingenious mechanisms and marvelous adaptations of nature; the wonderful order, the many beauties, the curious things revealed and displayed for our observation and study. Rather, it seems as if barriers were suddenly thrown down, and a vision opened of boundless knowledge and exhaustless being. Then, our past experience becomes merely the arch where-thro’

“Glams that untraveled world whose margin fades
Forever and forever when we move.”

Then feel we, rather,

“Like some watcher of the skies
When a new planet swims into his ken.”

Or, again, like Cortes,

“When with eagle eyes
He stood at the Pacific, and all his men
Looked at each other with a wild surmise,
Silent upon” that “peak in Darien.”*

* Besides what comes from the personal knowledge of the writer, the authority for statements of facts in the foregoing essay may be found in two articles on Herbert Spencer and his works in the “Popular Science Monthly,” one in the issue of November, 1874, the other in the issue of March, 1876, both by the late Prof. Edward L. Youmans, and also in the paper entitled “Herbert Spencer and the Doctrine of Evolution,” in Cazelles’ “Evolution Philosophy,” published by D. Appleton & Co. in 1875. The writer wishes furthermore to acknowledge his indebtedness to Miss Eliza A. Youmans for several valuable suggestions.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISCUSSION.

MR. JAMES A. SKILTON: —

Before entering upon the discussion of the admirable essay of Mr. Thompson, I may be permitted, having had little or nothing to do with its preparation, to congratulate you on this splendid programme of Essays and Readings upon the subject of Evolution. It may seem too much to say at this time, but I believe it will give a great impulse to the study of Evolution in the Christian church and elsewhere in America, and may produce effects now expected by few. Personally holding this opinion with tenacity and entire conviction, I might nevertheless not be willing to express it here and now if I stood alone in entertaining it. But I am made bold to utter it by the fact that I am in possession of the opinion of the Master himself on the subject, as expressed in the letter which I will now read:

“The Nook, Horsham Road, Dorking,

“Dear Sir:

24th July, 1888.

“I am obliged by your letter of July 11th, with its enclosures. I am glad to say, and you will perhaps be glad to hear, that I am considerably better than when I gave to Dr. W. J. Youmans the impression you quote. Leaving London in a very low state about a month ago, I have since improved greatly, and am now in hopes of getting back to something like the low level of health which I before had, though I scarcely expect to reach that amount of working power which has been usual with me.

“The information contained in your letter was, I need hardly say, gratifying to me both on personal and on public grounds. The spread of the doctrine of Evolution, first of all in its limited acceptance and now in its wider acceptance, is alike surprising and encouraging; and doubtless the movement now to be initiated by the lectures and essays set forth in your programme will greatly accelerate its progress — especially if full reports of your proceedings can be circulated in a cheap printed form. The mode of presentation described seems to me admirably adapted for popularizing evolution views, and it will, I think, be a great pity if the effect of such a presentation should be limited to a few listeners in Brooklyn.

“Wishing you and your coadjutors every success in your efforts,

“I am, truly, yours,

“Mr. J. A. SKILTON.”

“HERBERT SPENCER.”

Happening to have in my possession early in the summer an advance copy of your programme, it occurred to me that it might be to Mr. Spencer a comfort and a consolation, if not an aid to a renewal of strength, to learn what you were proposing to do; and I therefore sent him a copy of the programme, together with a letter of cordial sympathy; to which the letter just read is his reply. I subsequently learned, from Mr. W. R. Hughes of Birmingham, the President of the Sociological Section of one of them, that Mr. Spencer had caused the programme and my letter to be forwarded to societies in England and France engaged in the study and advancement of Evolution Philosophy, as matter of interest to European Evolutionists.

In listening with pleasure to the essay of the evening, I have found but one statement open to criticism. It seems to me we may believe the world has been blessed in that Mr. Spencer was not biased by a thorough academical education, but was left to the natural development of his intellectual powers untrammelled by direct and overmastering academic influences. His refusal to accept the alleged privileges and opportunities of such an education while yet a mere boy, marks, to my mind, the early self-recognition of those splendid natural powers by which the world has been already greatly benefited, and will continue to be benefited throughout the ages. I make only a passing allusion to this subject, which it would be out of place to discuss here at length; but I may be permitted to say that the history of the development of the mind and philosophy of Herbert Spencer is most instructive and interesting; that the great advances in the thought and work of the world are almost never made by those of the "guild," and that we should probably have marred rather than mended if we could have had it otherwise.

The time allotted me permits mention of only two or three incidents in that history. Examination of the original English edition of "Social Statics," published in 1850, discloses to us the action of a mind as yet dominated by its intellectual environment; the facts presented, the line of thought pursued, and the method of treatment adopted, being such as many of his contemporaries might naturally have employed in dealing with the subject. We find in that work little of the promise of the splendid fruitage we have already garnered from his subsequent works, except that derivable from the exhibition of transparent intellectual honesty and love of truth. Turning thence to the American edition of "Social Statics," published by the Appletons in 1865, we find that Spencer consented with reluctance to its publication

unchanged, and with prefatory qualification of the most important character, in the following words: "But in restating them he would bring into greater prominence the transitional nature of all political institutions, and the consequent *relative* goodness of some arrangements which have no claims to *absolute* goodness."

Between 1850 and 1865, then, Mr. Spencer had discovered the vast and most important difference between absolute and relative morals and principles, a difference which lies at the very foundation of his entire system of philosophy. When and how was he led to discover that difference? Looking over the list of his writings, we note his article on "Population," printed in the *Westminster Review* of July, 1852. That article commences with a reference to the Malthusian Theory of Population, and quotes approvingly the language of a sagacious and benevolent man, who said of it: "A time will come when this mystery will be unveiled, and when a beneficent law will be discovered, regulating this matter, in accordance with all the rest that we see of God's moral government of the world"; and forthwith Mr. Spencer proceeds to promulgate such a law. In that article we find recognition of that difference, and accompanying the same an unmistakable prophecy of the beneficent ethical philosophy disclosed in the "Data of Ethics," that lights the way through all the wilderness of his work and thought that lies between them.

It is a matter of associated interest to note that, according to the biography of Darwin, written by his son, it was the reading, in 1839, of the "Theory of Population," by Malthus, that gave him also an initial impulse for his splendid work in the field of the Struggle for Existence and Natural Selection. It is also of interest to note that, according to the history of the development of the thought of earlier ages, substantially the same great question and collection of questions occupied the attention of the great minds concerned in laying the foundations of Judaism and Christianity, and whose action has so powerfully influenced the history of the world.

In these facts we may at least find warrant for the study and investigation of the Evolution Philosophy in and through an Ethical Association attached to a Christian church and holding its sessions in its place of worship.

REV. JOHN W. CHADWICK :—

Mr. Chadwick expressed his pleasure in listening to the delightful essay by Mr. Thompson. He presumed that in claiming for Mr. Spencer the paternity of the Evolution philosophy, the essayist did not intend to ignore the prior claim of Darwin to the con-

ception of Evolution or Development in its biological aspects. Darwin commenced the investigations which resulted, finally, in the preparation of the "Origin of Species," twenty years prior to its publication,—before Mr. Spencer had begun his career as an author. Mr. Spencer's acquaintance and friendship with "George Eliot" he also thought worthy of note.

As to Spencer's conception of the Absolute as Unknowable, Mr. Chadwick had always felt that, even according to Mr. Spencer's own definitions, though unknown it was at the same time well-known; though hidden from us in its totality it was revealed in the entire phenomenal universe, where the method of its operation was open to our study.

MR. THOMAS GARDNER :—

The really essential features of Mr. Spencer's system have been lucidly presented by the essayist, and his criticism has also been judicious. Although I confess myself a devout follower of Mr. Spencer, I cannot bring my mind into subjection to his views as to the powers and province of government, and think that the "laissez-faire" system which he so confidently advocates is not always the best for a community or nation. I think there is not a little wisdom in the words of Edmund Burke, when he said, "Before I congratulate a people on having obtained their liberty which will allow them to do as they please, I think it would be well to wait and see what it will please them to do." I must confess that my bent of mind inclines me to sympathize more, in the matter of government, with the fervid aspirations of John Ruskin than with the colder reflections of Herbert Spencer.

Although no one has written on the subject of ethics in a simpler and clearer manner than Mr. Spencer, it has been his fate to be, whether wittingly or unwittingly, grossly and widely misunderstood; and it was refreshing to listen, to-night, to an exposition of his views on this crowning work of his life, wherein the really noble and tender sentiment underlying Mr. Spencer's speculation has been sympathetically presented. I am certainly of the opinion that the basis of his philosophy is a profoundly religious one, and look upon the attitude of the Agnostic, when confronted with the shadow of an unknowable and infinite deity, as pre-eminently reverential and worshipful. It is, I think, beyond question that all deep religious emotion finds its birthplace in a mystic region; and surely, in the noble range of the Evolution philosophy, there is a mystic region large enough to satisfy the aspirations of the most devout dreamer: in fact it is beyond the bounds of all time and space.

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