

part of an organism to adjust itself more and more completely to an environment which, it must be remembered, is itself in a state of perpetual change. Now, such equilibration may be direct or indirect. It is direct when the organism responds immediately to the demands of its surroundings. It is indirect where variations which are in the line of greater correspondence are gathered up, because they favour continuance of life, and transmitted to following generations. When these statements are looked at closely, a very interesting fact comes to light. While investigating the law of equilibration, we have at the same time been formulating the factors of organic evolution. For, clearly, the doctrine of direct equilibration is the doctrine, specially associated with the name of Lamarck, that changes in structure are brought about by those changes in function which are produced by the conditions of life; while the doctrine of indirect equilibration is simply Darwin's great doctrine of natural selection, or the survival of the fittest in the struggle for existence.

Nor is this all. By virtue of the light which the law of equilibration throws upon the vexed question of population, and, therefore, in turn, upon the whole problem of the future of the human race, it has also an immediate practical interest.

This problem, with its intimate connection with the facts of animal fertility, began seriously to engage the attention of thinkers towards the close of the eighteenth century. One remarkable outgrowth of the generous ardour and enthusiasm which accompanied the earlier developments of the French Revolution was the strong belief in human perfectibility which suddenly took pos-

session of some of the finest minds of the age. It seemed only necessary to throw off the numerous political and social shackles of the past, to get rid of the tyrannies of kingcraft and priestcraft and aristocracies, and to break the fetters of degrading forms and customs that had been handed down from the past; it seemed only necessary, in a word, to give men and women free play, and the brightest dreams of poet and seer would turn forthwith into still brighter realities. Something of the intense thrill of this great new hope we can catch in the earlier books of Wordsworth's *Prelude*; as in the later books we come into immediate touch with that numbing sense of disappointment and despair which settled down over the consciousness of the world when it was realised that France had indeed failed to make good the magnificent promises of 1789. We know how that practical failure brought the whole doctrine of human progress for a time into disrepute: such a work as Chateaubriand's *Essai sur les Révolutions Anciennes et Modernes* being simply one indication of a widespread reaction in thought. Meanwhile, expressive as it may now well seem to us to be of this sad change from sanguine expectation to doubt and despondency, appeared in 1798 the first edition of one of the world's epoch-making books—Malthus's *Essay on the Principle of Population*.¹ The central doctrine of

¹ "There is nothing new but what has been forgotten," says a clever French paradox. For the sake of those interested in what Buckle called the "paternity of ideas," it may be pointed out that, original as the work of Malthus seemed to be, he was not without predecessors in his own chosen field. One Townsend, in an account of a journey through Spain, had already broached the problem of the relation of human population to the means of support; and even

that book—the work, strangely enough, of an English clergyman of the Established Church—struck a deadly blow at the gorgeous speculations of humanitarian dreamers. The earthly Eden which men had declared to be at hand was now pronounced an impossibility. For Malthus showed conclusively, as it seemed to himself and to many others of his and later times, that the world is and always must be over-populated, and that the pressure of humanity upon the means of subsistence is not an accident, but a necessity. If, therefore, it is inevitable that human beings should increase much more rapidly than their sustenance, misery in one form or the other is a necessary accompaniment of human life; and wholesale death by mere starvation is only prevented by the operation of other factors which have hitherto combined to prevent population from running too far in advance of its material of support. Let progressive civilisation interfere with these factors, as it constantly tends to do—let it decrease wars, plagues, excessive and premature mortality, vices of various kinds, and enforced or voluntary celibacy—and upon the removal of these hitherto stringent preventive checks a universal battle for life would ensue. Hence it is useless to indulge in lyric enthusiasms about the reign of plenty and the kingdom of peace and love upon earth. The reign of plenty is a myth, the kingdom of peace and love an airy fiction. To all such gorgeous visions a death-blow was given by the revelation of an ever-

he had a precursor in that great writer who foreshadowed so many peculiarly modern ideas—Voltaire. (See the article "Population" in his *Dictionnaire Philosophique*.) The subject had also been touched by Hume and Benjamin Franklin.

lasting and inevitable want of balance between human population and its means of support.¹

Malthus's book came upon the world with the blight of disillusion. Its conclusions were widely accepted; its theories passed into the economist's recognised body of thought; the optimism which had characterised eighteenth-century thought was at an end.²

Remembering this, we are in a position to appreciate the importance of Spencer's own contribution to the subject. A profound investigation of the whole question of multiplication, asexual and sexual, sub-human and human, leads him to the conclusion, established as usual inductively and deductively, that, while excess of fertility has been and continues to be the cause of evolution, every fresh step in that evolution itself necessitates, in its turn, a decline in fertility. That human population will forever continue to press upon the means of human subsistence, as Malthus supposed, is therefore not a

¹ How pregnant were Malthus's speculations is shown by the fact that it is in this essay of his that we find the starting-point of Darwin's own development of thought—the development which presently culminated in the *Origin of Species*. Given this universal over-population, and it is clear that wholesale destruction must be all the time at work. As animals and plants are thus perpetually tending to increase faster than their means of sustenance, a struggle among them must result; and in this struggle those individuals of every species are likely to conquer and survive which are equipped for the conflict by even the most minute variations favouring them in gaining food and avoiding enemies. (See Darwin's own introduction to the sixth edition of the *Origin of Species*.)

² It must not be forgotten that the *Essay* was inspired by Godwin's writings, and was thus immediately directed against the current Utopianism. For its effect on the feeling of the time, see the Preface to Shelley's anti-reactionary poem, *The Revolt of Islam*.

fact. Individuation and reproduction are in necessary antagonism ; advance in the former must be followed by decrease in the latter ; and a gradual approach will thus be made towards an equilibrium "between the number of new individuals produced and the number which survive and propagate."¹ Fecundity is thus not a permanent factor, as is implied in the Malthusian view ; and pressure of population and its accompanying evils, instead of remaining the one problem to be encountered all along the line of human progress, must gradually work itself out altogether :—

The excess of fertility has itself rendered the process of civilisation inevitable ; and the process of civilisation must inevitably diminish fertility, and at last destroy its excess. From the beginning pressure of population has been the proximate cause of progress. It produced the original diffusion of the race. It compelled men to abandon predatory habits and take to agriculture. It led to the clearing of the earth's surface. It forced men into the social state ; made social organisation inevitable ; and has developed the social sentiments. It has stimulated to progressive improvements in production and to increased skill and intelligence. It is daily thrusting us into closer contact and more mutually dependent relationships. And, after having caused, as it ultimately must, the due peopling of the globe, and the raising of all its habitable parts into the highest state of culture—after having brought all processes for the satisfaction of human wants to perfection—after having, at the same time, developed the intellect into complete competency for its work, and the feelings into complete fitness for social life—after having done all this, the pressure of population, as it gradually finishes its work, must gradually bring itself to an end.²

Thus the curse pronounced by Malthus is stripped of its terror, and a way of return is opened to the older faith in the progress of mankind. And

it may be noted in passing that this faculty for discovering the soul of goodness in things which, superficially viewed, seem entirely evil is highly characteristic of Spencer's whole course of thought. The doctrine of evolution—so depressing to many, and, within recent years, so often used as the basis of a pessimistic philosophy—is by him habitually interpreted upon the optimistic side. By its aid, again and again, in Emerson's picturesque phrase, he has converted "the Furies into Muses and the hells into benefit."

IX.

Many competent critics have regarded the *Principles of Psychology* as Spencer's greatest achievement, and not, perhaps, without good cause. Nowhere else, certainly, could we find a more striking exhibition of his magnificent powers of both analysis and synthesis, of his clear perception of the significance of the minutest details, of his daring sweep of generalisation and deduction, of his firm control over the longest and most intricate chains of reasoning. To the phenomena of no other subject, it may be added, have evolutionary principles been applied with more conspicuous results.

The old psychology had been purely statical. Its subject-matter had been the manifestations of intelligence in the modern civilised adult ; and a hard-and-fast line had been drawn between these and all the manifestations of intelligence exhibited by the subhuman world. Mind in man was held to differ absolutely and generically from mind in animals ; and no study of the latter could be resorted to in the hope of throwing light upon the problems of the former. The foolish antithesis of instinct and reason is a sturdy survival of this old thought.

¹ *Principles of Biology*, § 377. ² *Ibid*, § 376.

This traditional course, followed unquestioningly from generation to generation, and by school after school of metaphysicians, had naturally carried the subject of psychology but little beyond the point reached by the fantastic speculations of mediæval scholasticism. Evolution offered the student an entirely new standpoint. Its great principle of the continuity of all phenomena, applied to the problems of intelligence, showed that all absolute distinctions, here as elsewhere, are mere subjective illusions. Between mind in its highest development and mind in its first dim awakenings no boundary can anywhere be set; and the complex intellect of the modern adult, so far from being treated as a thing unique and apart, has thus henceforth to be regarded as the production of the compounding and recompounding of simpler and still simpler elements. Mind is to be understood only in the light of its evolution.

As in the *Principles of Biology*, then, the general truths of life were interpreted through the fundamental laws of evolution, so in the *Principles of Psychology* the facts and problems of mind are elucidated in the same way. Given the nervous shock,¹ which Spencer distin-

¹ Such is the word employed by Spencer, but he strictly means *psychical* shock. Anxious as he was throughout his argument to keep the psychical phenomena distinct from their physical accompaniments, it is a little curious that he should have slipped into such an unfortunate use of the word "nervous"—a word that threatens to blur the whole issue. When, by the severest analysis, we have followed psychical action down to its faint dawn in a simple response to the stimulus of the environment, we are no nearer than we were at the opening of the inquiry to a comprehension of the passage from nervous action to psychical action; that passage still remains, as Tyndall said, unthinkable. We have not explained how sensation arises; we do

guishes as the primordial and unresolvable element, or ultimate unit, of consciousness, the business of scientific psychology is to follow the process of progressive integration and differentiation, step by step, from reflex action, through sensation, instinct, memory, reason, the feelings, and the will, relating their progressive changes at every point with corresponding changes in the nervous system. But more than this: the principle of continuity further warns us against any attempt to fix a barrier between physiological and psychological phenomena. The manifestations of physical and mental activity have also their unity of composition, for the life of the body and mental life are species, of which life, properly so called, is the genus.

Though we commonly regard mental and bodily life as distinct, it needs only to ascend somewhat above the ordinary point of view to see that they are but subdivisions of life in general, and that no line of demarcation can be drawn between them otherwise than arbitrarily. Doubtless, to those who persist after the popular fashion in contemplating only the extreme forms of the two, this assertion will appear as incredible as the assertion that a tree arises by imperceptible changes out of a seed, would appear to one who had seen none of the intermediate stages.....[But] it is not more certain that, from the simple reflex action by which the infant sucks, up to the elaborate reasoning of the adult man, the progress is by daily infinitesimal steps, than it is certain that between the automatic actions of the lowest creatures and the

not know how it is possible. And thus, as psychological analysis carries us no further than the psychical shock, it is with this, and not with the physical side of the double process, that synthesis must begin. (See on this point the very interesting note on p. 444 of vol. ii. of Fiske's *Cosmic Philosophy*. Mr. Fiske ventured to change "nervous" to "psychical," and adds that Spencer authorised him to say that in so doing he had his concurrence.)

highest conscious actions of the human race a series of actions displayed by the various tribes of the animal kingdom may be so placed as to render it impossible to say of any one step in the series, Here intelligence begins.¹

The method of investigation that evolution has thus rendered possible has achieved, along with many other splendid triumphs, one very notable success. It has effected a permanent compromise between two great antagonistic schools of psychology—the experimentalist and the transcendentalist, or the followers of Locke on the other hand and those of Leibnitz and Kant on the other. This famous dispute, which antedated by centuries the celebrated philosophers with whose names it is now generally associated, and which, before the rise of the doctrine of evolution, promised to be perennial, concerned the nature of the human faculty. “All our knowledge is derived from experience” was the fundamental dictum of the empiricists. “On the contrary,” replied their opponents, “we possess ideas which transcend experience—which are innate.” Spencer, approaching the whole question from the evolutionary side, saw that the controversy from first to last was a controversy of partial views. The weakness of each system was that it accepted a portion of the truth for the entire truth. To say that, antecedent to experience, the mind is an absolute blank is, as he pointed out, to ignore the essential questions, “Whence comes the power of organising experiences? whence arise the different degrees of that power possessed by different races of organisms and different individuals of the same race?”² But is this to throw up the empirical case altogether? Not at all. The pre-estab-

lished internal relations of the innateness of which so much is made by the idealists, if transcendent to the experiences of the individual, are not transcendent to that vast chain of ancestral experience, running back through ages of barbarism and animality to the lowest beginnings of life, of which the present individual is only the terminal link. The moment the *venue* of discussion was changed from the limited area of individual experience to the immeasurable area of universal experience the ancient difficulty vanished. What the transcendentalist called *à priori* principles the evolutionist regards as *à priori* indeed to the individual, but *à posteriori* to the race; that is, as race experiences which in the individual appear as intuitions. We need no longer quarrel, therefore, over the so-called “forms of thought,” and the question of relative potential intellectuality becomes clear. Of a surety the doctrine of evolution is a great moderator of philosophic discords, and, since it is notorious that philosophic discords have been almost as fierce and obstinate as controversies in the theological arena, it should receive a generous meed of the blessing promised to peacemakers.

A word of warning must be added ere we close these few paragraphs on the Spencerian psychology.

A superficial reading of what has just been written concerning the continuity of phenomena, and the impossibility of drawing any dividing line between physical and psychical life, might only too easily lead the unwary student to conclude that Spencer’s doctrines end in materialism pure and simple. This, indeed, is the popular view of the matter, held to with stolid tenacity despite continual protest and repeated disproof. Yet on no point did Spencer endeavour

¹ *Principles of Psychology* (first edition).

² *Principles of Psychology*, § 208.

to make himself more explicit. Already in the concluding paragraphs of *First Principles* he had done his utmost to show that the arguments contained in that work lend no support whatever to either of the current antagonistic views respecting the ultimate nature of things. "Their implications are no more materialistic than they are spiritualistic; and no more spiritualistic than they are materialistic," he there asserted; since our antithetic conceptions of spirit and matter, necessary as they must seem to us, are still nothing more than symbols of the Unknown Reality which underlies both. Developing this truth more fully in the *Principles of Psychology*, he thus declared himself in the chapter on "The Substance of Mind" (§ 63):—

Here.....we arrive at the barrier which needs to be perpetually pointed out, alike to those who seek materialistic explanations of mental phenomena and to those who are alarmed lest such explanations may be found. This last class prove by their fear, almost as much as the first prove by their hope, that they believe Mind may possibly be interpreted in terms of Matter; whereas many whom they vituperate as materialists are profoundly convinced that there is not the remotest possibility of so interpreting them. For those who, not deterred by foregone conclusions, have pushed their analysis to the uttermost see very clearly that the concept we form to ourselves of Matter is but the symbol of some form of power absolutely and forever unknown to us; and a symbol which we cannot suppose to be like the reality without involving ourselves in contradictions (*First Principles*, § 16). They also see that the representation of all objective activities in terms of Motion is but a representation of them, and not a knowledge of them; and that we are immediately brought to alternative absurdities if we assume the Power manifested to us as Motion to be in itself that which we conceive as Motion (*First Principles*, § 17). When with these conclusions, that Matter and Motion as we think them, are but symbolic of unknowable forms of existence, we join the conclusion lately reached that Mind also is unknowable, and

that the simplest form under which we can think of its substance is but a symbol of something that can never be rendered into thought; we see that the whole question is at last nothing more than the question whether these symbols should be expressed in terms of those or those in terms of these—a question scarcely worth deciding, since either answer leaves us as completely outside of the reality as we were at first.

The battle of Spiritualism and Materialism is, therefore, a battle merely of symbols and of words.

How thoroughly unmaterialistic is Spencer's whole view of the question is made manifest by the paragraph immediately following the one from which the above extract is taken. Here he distinctly says, once and for all, "that were we compelled to choose between the alternatives of translating mental phenomena into physical phenomena, or of translating physical phenomena into mental phenomena, the latter alternative would seem the more acceptable of the two." He proceeds to give, in the course of a long paragraph which well deserves the closest attention, his reasons for this assertion; and concluding that "of the two it seems easier to translate so-called Matter into so-called Spirit than to translate so-called Spirit into so-called Matter (which latter is, indeed, wholly impossible)," he again reminds us that, after all, "no translation can carry us beyond our symbols." After this, only the familiar ignorance, carelessness, and perversity of the general religious world can explain the fact that even to-day Spencer's teachings are frequently denounced as "materialistic." It is surprising how often the shortsightedness of the theologians has led them to treat with antagonism men who, if they only knew it, should rather be reckoned among the truest friends of religion.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SPENCERIAN SOCIOLOGY

I.

SPENCER'S social and political teachings are familiar enough in their main outlines to readers who otherwise know little or nothing of his works. The most popularly written and widely circulated of his books—the *Education* alone excepted—are those which deal directly with the problems arising from the relations of citizens to government and to one another. In the pages of *Social Statics*, *The Study of Sociology*, and *The Man versus The State*, these problems in their multifarious aspects are handled with extraordinary force, clearness, and felicity of illustration; and, though first principles are kept in view throughout, and are shown to constitute the firm foundation of every doctrine advanced—though in this way philosophic coherence and consistency are given to every chain of reasoning—the popular standpoint is that adopted; the arguments are directed rather to the general reader than to the special student. By the larger public, therefore, the individualistic principles which form the core of all his political teachings are accepted or rejected without any thought of their relation to his philosophic system as a whole; how they fall into the body of his work, and what exact place they occupy there, are questions that seldom come up for consideration.

This is the more natural because, even when we have grown tired, as Zschokke put it, of “living in the furnished lodgings of tradition,” very few of us

have thought out for ourselves a systematised theory of life. We have what we are pleased to call our ideas (usually more correctly to be described as our feelings) about most things; and the less we understand of a subject the stronger our assertions of opinion are likely to be. But these ideas rarely hang together among themselves—are rarely attached to any deep underlying principles. Their roots run down into the emotions; they draw their nourishment thence; and some accident of early education, environment, self-interest, or class-bias, gives them, unknown to ourselves, their special form and colour. It is curious in studying our friends—we are less likely to observe such inconsistencies in ourselves—to find, in consequence, what a strange jumble of contradictory notions the majority of them manage to find room for, without for a moment seeming to imperil thereby their self-satisfaction or peace of mind. The assertive radical, brought face to face with some novel form of an old question, unexpectedly develops a rabid conservatism: the bigoted conservative advocates on some special isolated point doctrines which, applied to other and perhaps more familiar issues, he would look upon with horror. Men who are urging the world forward in one direction are holding it back in others; and the gospels of yesterday and to-morrow are proclaimed in one breath by the same preacher. Few realise the absurdity of all this; few

are aware of the anarchy of thought and incongruity of social aims to which it must inevitably give rise; fewer still, perhaps, understand that it is due to the absence in most men—even in those of general intelligence and more than average culture—of a methodical habit of mind, and the guiding power of some great central principles, to the touchstone of which every judgment and opinion may be brought.

Caring nothing for the coherence of their own ideas, most readers naturally fail to inquire into the coherence of the ideas of other people. Hence they are willing to deal with that one department of the Spencerian thought which happens to come under their particular notice without troubling to raise the question of its connection with other departments. Spencer's individualism may or may not organically belong to and of necessity grow out of the principles of evolution as expounded by him; but, while they will discuss the individualism itself, this is the last matter that is likely to detain them. Hence it is precisely this point we propose to deal with here. To expound Spencer's social and political views in their practical applications would, considering how frequently and in what popular language he himself set them forth, be a work of supererogation; to discuss them would lie outside the scope of our plan. But to show how these views are affiliated upon the main body of his thought will be to carry out to the full the design of this introduction.¹

¹ There is the more need to do this, first, because many otherwise loyal adherents of Spencerianism have refused to follow their teacher into the extremes of his political thought; and, secondly, because of the opinion, widely diffused among them, that his social doctrines, espoused long

II.

The once famous saying of Sir James Mackintosh, that "constitutions are not made, but grow," struck the men of his time as singularly original and suggestive; which will not surprise us when we remember the purely mechanical theories of social history which had stood unchallenged during the eighteenth century, and were still current when he wrote. But, as Spencer says, "in our day the most significant thing" about it is "that it was ever thought so significant." Not only has the principle enunciated in it long since passed into a commonplace, but from the evolutionary standpoint we all now see that it forms but a small portion of a much larger truth. Under all its aspects and through all its ramifications society itself is the result of slow and natural development, not of artificial contrivance—a growth and not a manufacture. This means that it must be dealt with not as a mechanism, but as a living thing.

The comparison between society and an individual organism had been instituted before Spencer's time, but in a way too vague for it to be productive of much result. Spencer, in taking the matter up among his earlier studies, endeavoured to do something more than point out more or less fanciful analogies. Utilising the comprehensive generalisations of modern biology, he undertook to indicate the real parallelisms.¹

before the working out of his general system, have since been cleverly dovetailed into that system, and form no proper part of it. As this whole subject is a vast and complicated one for brief treatment, I may be perhaps allowed to record that Spencer himself expressed entire satisfaction with my analysis of his arguments and conclusions.

¹ These parallelisms, outlined in the article

does not inter-dependence produce one? Q. with theory of social systems.

These are four in number, and may be summarised in succinct statement thus:—

1. Commencing as small aggregations, both societies and individual organisms insensibly augment in mass, in some instances eventually reaching a bulk ten thousand times greater than their original size.

2. At first so simple in structure as to be considered structureless, both societies and individual organisms assume in the course of their growth a continually increasing complexity of structure.

3. In a society in its early undeveloped state, as in an individual organism in its early and undeveloped state, there exists scarcely any mutual dependence of parts; in both cases the parts gradually acquire a mutual dependence, and this becomes at last so great that the life and activity of each part are made possible only by the life and activity of the rest.

4. The life and development of a society, like the life and development of an individual organism, are independent of and far more prolonged than the life and development of any of its component units, who severally are born, grow, reproduce, and die, while the body politic composed of them survives generation after generation, increasing in mass, completeness of structure, and functional activity.

Consideration of these striking parallels will reveal the fact that the most important of them—the second and third in the above tabulation—present elements that bring the growth of society directly under the general law of evolution. Societies, like individual organisms, pass, during the course of their development, from simplicity to complexity of structure, at the same time that their various parts gradually acquire greater and greater mutual dependence; in other words, the changes undergone by them are in the direction at once of

on "The Social Organism" (first published in the *Westminster Review* for January, 1860), were subsequently worked out in detail in the *Principles of Sociology*, Part II. See also the essay on "Specialised Administration."

increasing heterogeneity and of increasing unity. It may, indeed, be remarked incidentally that no more conspicuous illustrations of the formula of evolution can be found than those furnished by the study of social growth. Barbarous tribes, lowest in the scale of development, are nothing but loose, almost homogeneous, aggregations of individuals and families, living in contiguity, but hardly at all depending one upon another. Powers and functions are practically alike, the only marked differences being those which accompany difference of sex. "Every man is warrior, hunter, fisherman, toolmaker, builder; every woman performs the same drudgeries"—that is, there is as yet no specialisation of parts; and similarly, "every family is self-sufficing, and, save for purposes of aggression and defence, might as well live apart from the rest"—there is little or no mutual dependence. Very early, however, important changes manifest themselves. Differentiation begins. With the appearance of some kind of chieftainship arises distinction between the governing and the governed; and as this distinction grows more and more decided, the controlling agencies themselves gradually break up, and in course of time develop into the highly complex political organisations of semi-civilised and civilised lands. Meanwhile the accompanying industrial divergencies are even more significant. Individuals, no longer continuing to perform for themselves all the functions necessary for the preservation of their own lives and the lives of those immediately connected with them, begin to devote themselves to separate kinds of occupation; whence arise the first suggestions of that industrial specialisation which has been carried to such an extreme in our own day, and which with

every year is tending to become more marked. But one all-important fact must never be lost sight of. These changes along the line of ever-increasing heterogeneity can go on step by step only in combination with corresponding changes along the line of ever-increasing integration. The governing agency can assume the labours and responsibilities of oversight, guidance, and direction only by being relieved, to a degree proportionate to the demand of these upon it, of the daily strain of providing for its own wants. In this way alone can the regulative and maintaining agencies become distinct. Similarly with the industrial changes themselves. As soon as any one individual limits himself to the performance of one particular life-sustaining function, for which he may possess unusual aptitude, he must necessarily become dependent upon the rest of the community to the extent of the functions left unfulfilled by him; while he performs certain functions in excess, and thereby benefits others, others must also perform functions in excess for his benefit. Hence, it is clear that, if society is to maintain its corporate life, no differentiation can take place without integration; increase of specialisation in social changes is not only accompanied by increase of mutual dependence, but is absolutely impossible without it.

From the first stages of social growth to the developments recorded in yesterday's newspaper, what we call progress has everywhere been marked by the same characteristics. All changes in the line of advance have been changes rendering the social structure more complex while increasing its organic unity; and this double-sided movement has by this time gone so far that we are to-day witnessing its effects in the modified inter-relations

of the great nations of the civilised world. The new thought of the solidarity of the human race simply reminds us of the application of the evolutionary principle to the widest possible issues. For not only are the great nations becoming more and more completely specialised and unified within themselves, but the civilised world is itself slowly developing into a vast organic whole, made up of many such highly differentiated but mutually dependent aggregations.

Two important aspects of the principles here indicated must now be re-emphasised as presenting truths to which we shall recur later on. In the first place, in the social as in the individual organism, repetition of similar parts implies a relatively low stage of development, higher stages being characterised by the marking off of special organs for the performance of special functions. In the second place, the activity of every organ being limited, adequate performance of its special function by each organ is incompatible with continuance on its part to perform other functions. That its own function may be duly carried on, it must be relieved by other organs of the need for sustaining other activities.

Having thus indicated the principal parallelisms between societies and individual organisms, Spencer proceeds to point out their chief differences. As there is no necessity here for us to follow him into his consideration and discussion of these, we will confine ourselves to the briefest enumeration of them. He finds the contrasts also to be four in number:

1. Societies have no specific external forms.
2. The living tissue whereof an individual organism consists forms a continuous mass; the living elements of a society do not form a continuous mass, but are more or less

widely dispersed over some portion of the earth's surface.

3. The ultimate living elements of an individual organism are mostly fixed in their relative positions; those of the social organism are capable of moving from place to place.

4. In the body of an animal only a special tissue is endowed with feeling; in a society all the members are endowed with feeling.

With much ingenuity Spencer labours to show that these obvious contrasts are neither so fundamental nor so important as would at first sight appear. This part of the matter, however, does not now concern us. But the last-named distinction between the social and the individual organism should be looked at a little more closely, because it points to a profound truth of immediate moment to us here. For what does this distinction imply? It implies nothing less than this—that there is a radical difference between the relations of parts and whole in the individual organism, and the relations of parts and whole in the social organism.

While in individual bodies the welfare of all other parts is rightly subservient to the welfare of the nervous system, whose pleasurable or painful activities make up the good or ill of life; in bodies politic the same thing does not hold, or holds to but a very slight extent. It is well that the lives of all parts of an animal should be merged in the life of the whole, because the whole has a corporate consciousness capable of happiness or misery. But it is not so with a society, since its living units do not and cannot lose individual consciousness, and since the community as a whole has no corporate consciousness. And this is an everlasting reason why the welfares of citizens cannot rightly be sacrificed to some supposed benefit of the State: but why, on the other hand, the State is to be maintained solely for the benefit of citizens. The corporate life must here be subservient to the lives of the parts, instead of the lives of the parts being subservient to the corporate life.¹

¹ "The Social Organism" (*Essays*, vol. i.).

III.

This, which at first sight might seem to be a conclusion standing by itself, and of no further use to us, may for present purposes be taken as a new point of departure. Let us examine in detail the question of the relations of parts to whole in the social organism.

From the earliest developments of gregariousness to the latest extension of governmental activity, the only ultimate authority for the restraints exercised by society in its corporate capacity over its individual members is the welfare of the individual members. The welfare of society is the proximate end only; the final end is the welfare of the units of which the society is composed. This has been made clear by the above considerations. But does this mean that the relations of the individual to the corporate life should be or could be of a stable or unchanging character? From the evolutionary standpoint such an idea is on the face of it untenable. On the contrary, such relations must inevitably vary with the varying conditions of social growth. The social organism, like all other organisms whatsoever, must mould the activities of its inner life in response to outer needs. Only by adequately meeting those needs can its existence be maintained, and, while the ultimate end of social organisation can never be other than that alleged, furtherance of that ultimate end may often be impossible, save by temporary postponement of it to the proximate end; in other words, the welfare of society may have to take precedence of the welfare of the individual, and individual life be sacrificed to social preservation. We may put the matter even more strongly, and state at once that throughout the past the proximate

Cf. Julio de Mattos: Preface to "Superst. Socialista"

end, that of social preservation, has habitually been of prime importance, the claims of the individual in contradistinction to those of the corporate body having only gradually emerged as vital issues. In all transitional states, indeed, the relations of which we speak must necessarily be relations of compromise; but such compromise will favour the whole as against the parts, or the parts as against the whole, according to the type of social organisation—the type itself being evolved in answer to the medium of social needs. The question therefore arises, How do the general conditions of any given society tend to determine the relations of its citizens to the State?

The evolution of life at large, alike in its higher and in its lower forms, has been possible only because in the average of cases there has throughout been a definite connection between conduct and consequence. But for the fact that individuals structurally best adapted to the conditions of their existence have prospered by means of such fuller adaptation, while individuals less favourably endowed have dropped out in the struggle for existence, no advance in life could ever have taken place. This law, which, ethically enunciated, becomes the principle that each individual ought to receive the good and evil arising from his own nature, is the primary law of existence, holding good of all creatures, and qualified in those living solitary lives only by that “self-subordination needed among the higher of them for the rearing of offspring.”

In non-gregarious creatures, therefore, the only conflict is between self-subserving and race-subserving activities; and species which do not postpone in requisite degrees the former class of

activities to the latter will inevitably disappear. But in gregarious creatures another factor comes into play. Each individual in the pursuit of his own satisfactions must be prevented from interfering with the similar pursuit of their own satisfactions on the part of others; for in the absence of such prevention an associated state would be impossible, and each individual would lose the benefits that co-operation would bring. The associated state, therefore, demands, in addition to that large postponement of self to offspring which lies at the bottom of all life, a constant postponement of self to fellows, negatively by restraint of actions that impede, and positively by performance of actions that further, the fullest and most harmonious co-operation.

Putting these two principles together, we are able to establish an important conclusion. The prerequisite of life in general embodied in the first must be qualified in the way indicated by the second when the individual, no longer isolated, lives in association with others whose presence and claims necessarily limit the range of his activities. Hence we reach the formula of absolute justice.¹

¹ This may be the proper place to point out a distinctive feature in Spencer's Ethics—the separation of absolute from relative ethics. Absolutely right conduct is conduct having no concomitant of pain, or painful consequences, either to self or others; all other conduct, though it may be relatively right, or the least wrong possible in the circumstances, is not absolutely right. In the drawing up of a code of absolute morality, therefore, we must consider the ideal man in an ideal state of society; and relative morality must then aim to approximate to this as closely as is possible under any given conditions. In discussing the Spencerian ethics this vital distinction must never be lost sight of. See *Data of Ethics*, chap. xv., and compare this

“Every man is free to do that which he wills, provided he infringes not the equal freedom of any other man.”

But now we have to notice that under certain conditions these abstract principles require still further qualification. The ultimate authority for the existence of the associated state is, as we have seen, the increased welfare that all its individual units are enabled to obtain by means of it. This renders the preservation of the associated state itself of the first importance; and when it is imperilled, sacrifice of the individual to secure its continuance receives strong ethical sanction. This fact gives us the clue for which we are in search in our inquiry as to how the relations of citizen to State depend upon existing social conditions. For the welfare of the individual can only, ethically considered, take entire and immediate precedence of the welfare of the community at large so long as the community itself is not in danger—in other words, during periods of sustained peace. During periods of military activity or preparation—that is, when rightly or wrongly it is supposed that the community is jeopardised from without—the individual has, to a large extent, to be made subservient to the State, often even to the extent of being called upon to surrender property and life to aid in keeping the social structure intact.

We see, then, that in the social organism the relations of parts to whole depend upon the average activities of the whole. So long as the community is engaged in a struggle for existence with antagonistic communities, its corporate

with *Social Statics*, Part I., chap. i., and the article on “Absolute Political Ethics” (*Essays*, vol. iii.).

life has to be maintained at any cost—even at the cost of its component units; and societies in which this necessity is most completely met stand, other things equal, the best chance of preservation. Sanction for the temporary postponement of the individual to the State is thus obtained; but this sanction holds good only so long as the specified conditions continue. Just as soon as the external struggle for existence ceases, the sanction for the postponement of the individual to the State can no longer be alleged, and all qualification lapses in regard to the principles above set forth.

IV.

Before we can appreciate the full significance of this conclusion, we must look at the matter for a moment from a somewhat different point of view.

Theoretically, three kinds of social aggregation may be distinguished, according to the purposes which association is intended to subserve. Men may group themselves together (1) merely for the sake of companionship; (2) for combined action against enemies, animal or human, or both; or (3) for better satisfaction by means of reciprocal aid of the various requirements of life—higher as well as lower.¹ The resulting aggregates may

¹ *Justice*, § 102. All this does not, of course, mean that men have ever *consciously* banded themselves together for any one or more of these purposes. We have here nothing to do with the monstrous fiction of a social contract, which was one of the favourite theories of earlier political speculation, from the days of Hobbes and Locke onward, and which at the hands of its greatest exponent, Rousseau, became charged with immense revolutionary power. We simply recognise that, according to obtaining conditions, association has been naturally brought about here in response to one kind of demand, there in response to another.

now did Rousseau say it well that it was.

be defined respectively as non-co-operative, military, and industrial.

Of the first an instance is found in the case of the Esquimaux, who live in groups, but who, having no external enemies, never combine for purposes of corporate offence and defence, and among whom industrial co-operation has gone no further than a division of labour between man and wife in each separate family. Examples of the second class are of course very numerous, and may be found in the purest form in "hunting-tribes at large, the activities of which alternate between chasing animals and going to war with one another," and in which industrial co-operation, if exhibited at all, is exhibited only in a very rudimentary way. When we come to the third division we are met, in search for illustrations, by the difficulty arising from lack of material. The purely industrial society does not yet exist in a developed form. A few perfectly peaceful tribes are to be found here and there in the world—like the Bodos, the Dhimals, and the Kocchs—who, never needing to combine for aggression or defence, do yet to some extent render mutual assistance in the simple activities of their daily lives. But all advanced peoples without exception, as well as most of those relatively low down in the scale of civilisation, yield examples of association for the achievement of all the three ends above distinguished. The desire for social intercourse is satisfied; life is made easier and larger by means of industrial co-operation; but at the same time there is still need for corporate action, if not of an aggressive, then, at any rate, of a defensive nature.

Now, the fact that even the most fully industrialised of developed societies are still *quasi-military* in their constitution

introduces us to an important truth. Antagonistic as are the military and the industrial activities, throughout the whole course of social evolution, from the very beginning until now, the former has played a main part in the development of the latter. But for war, little advance would have been possible. War has been essentially the consolidating factor, and its ever-widening sweep has in the upshot only cleared a larger area for the play of industrial forces. Each new integration brought about by conquest has ultimately changed the warlike relations formerly existing between the communities integrated into relations of a peaceful character; their interests, instead of being antagonistic, become interdependent. As this process, which has gone on from the earliest dawn of human history, continues, its results, though of the same general nature, will be on a grander scale. Eventually, war will bring about its own destruction by aiding in the production, throughout a world-area, of those industrial conditions which will render anti-industrial relations henceforth impossible.

Recognising this fact—which is indeed one of too much significance ever to be lost sight of—we can understand how it is that even the most highly-civilised nations are still in a transitional state. A factor of supreme importance in the earlier stages of their development, war, though of ever-decreasing importance in their more advanced stages, has, down to quite recent times, played a large part in the unification of national interests, which is one phase of all social progress. Hence, we can for the time being reach nothing better than a compromise between the demands of military co-operation on the one hand and the demands of industrial co-operation on

the other. But here a further distinction is to be made. This compromise, formerly in favour of the military claims, is now (in some modern countries considerably and in a few markedly) in favour of the industrial claims. While hitherto the all-important thing was to keep up military efficiency, and industry was valued only to the extent to which it aided in doing this, now, on the contrary, industrial growth is the all-important thing, and military efficiency is valued only in so far as, by yielding adequate protection, it furthers peaceful co-operation. Hence, though, among the more advanced societies, we cannot specify any as absolutely military or absolutely industrial, we can still divide them according as the warlike activities take precedence of the peaceful, or the reverse, into two classes, which we may call the military-industrial and the industrial-military.

What, now, should we infer to be, and do we actually find to be, the characteristic differences of these two classes of societies? Their most salient and fundamental points of distinction may be briefly summarised.¹

In the military-industrial type, the corporate life being the unit of organisation, we have centralised control, despotic rule, and widely-ramified gradations of rank. As reflecting the average life of the community, the religion is one of enmity—is marked by the prominence of stern doctrines and a vindictive spirit; while the ecclesiastical system exhibits an elaborate hierarchy closely resembling the hierarchy of the political system. Meanwhile, industrial activities, regarded only as factors for the sus-

tentation of the military system, are not only despised as vulgar, but are more or less subjected to State interference and control; and since it is the welfare of the State that is always held in view, the general life of the community is dealt with in any way that may seem to secure higher corporate capacity. Thus the *régime* is one of compulsory co-operation. The individual belongs to the State and exists for the State.

Over against this we may set the leading characteristics of the industrial-military type. The need for such corporate action as is called for in war having largely lapsed, there is a relative absence of centralised control; democratic rule gradually supersedes despotic rule; and the old gradations of rank slowly lose their meaning and tend to disappear. The harsher traits of the religious creed drop away, and, in answer to the peaceful life of the society, gentler and more humane aspects come into relief. Along with this goes the breaking up of the ecclesiastical as of the political hierarchy, and the rise and spread of nonconformity. Industrial activities, no longer considered only as furnishing maintenance for the State, little by little rise in general esteem and free themselves from State control and dictation, while the individual, ceasing to be simply a servant of the general community, refuses to tolerate the interference of the community in the various pursuits of his private life. This is the *régime* of voluntary co-operation. The State exists simply for the individual.

It is hardly necessary to say that, omitting the many other cases that might be cited in illustration, the history of civilisation during the past three or four hundred years has shown, along with gradual decrease in military activity,

¹ *Principles of Sociology*, §§ 258-262. See also the article on "Specialised Administration."

a distinct, though of course by no means regular, movement away from the military-industrial type of social organisation and towards the industrial-military type. This movement, though general, has gone further in some countries than in others; and the contrast presented to-day between England and America on the one hand, and the great continental nations of Europe on the other, is a striking and instructive one. All this is manifest enough; but there is another point, equally significant in its way, that might easily escape attention. The metamorphosis in question goes on only while conditions remain favourable; as soon as they become unfavourable, a retrograde tendency asserts itself almost immediately. No lessons of recent history are more weighty than those taught by this social atavism. After remarking, in the course of one of his many contributions to the discussion of this subject, that, just before the civil war in America, industrialisation had advanced to such an extent in the Northern States that "military organisation had almost disappeared, and everything martial had fallen into contempt," Spencer continues:—

During the late war in America Mr. Seward's boast—"I touch this bell, and any man in the remotest State is a prisoner of the Government" (a boast which was not an empty one, and which was by many of the Republican party greatly applauded)—shows us how rapidly, along with militant activities, there tends to be resumed the needful type of centralised structure, and how there quickly grow up the corresponding sentiments and ideas. Our own history since 1815 has shown a double change of this kind. During the thirty years' peace the militant organisation dwindled, the military sentiment greatly decreased, the industrial organisation rapidly developed, the assertion of the individuality of the citizen became more decided, and many restrictive and despotic regulations were

got rid of. Conversely, since the revival of militant activities and structures on the Continent our own offensive and defensive structures have been redeveloping; and the tendency towards increase of that centralised control which accompanies such structures has become marked.¹

Could we do so without committing ourselves to an unmanageable digression, we might profitably consider this subject in some of its remoter bearings. For—to indicate a few points only—the marked increase in military activity which has taken place among ourselves during recent years has not only brought about this increase in centralised control and corresponding tendency to tamper with the liberty of the individual, but has also been necessarily accompanied by the revival of many characteristics of the military type of society—excessive loyalty to rulers; deference to authority; reassertion of the claims of the privileged classes; greater activity and power of the priesthood; intellectual reaction all along the line. Nor is this all. Less obvious, but not less important, changes may meanwhile be noted in the general temper of society. The recrudescence of militarism and the national spirit of aggression has everywhere called into play the feelings which properly belong to the stage of barbarism; and the love of violence is shown (among countless other ways) by the immense popularity of all kinds of literature and art which deal with deeds of turbulence and bloodshed; by the current mania for athleticism and the worship of physical strength and prowess; and by the re-establishment of brutal sports. It is a truth which few people seem able to appreciate that there is a vital relationship between the character of the life of

¹ "Specialised Administration." See also *Justice*, § 72, etc.

a society and the character of the lives of its component units; that national violence will be always attended by individual violence; and that, in a word, it is practically useless to preach the gospel of love to the men and women of a nation while the nation itself is living according to the gospel of hate.¹

But now, returning to the main line of our argument, we have to ask: What practical conclusions are we to draw from the inquiries which we have instituted?

First, that the rise of individual independence of the State, and the decrease of State meddling with the multitudinous affairs of private life, have naturally accompanied the gradual decline of militancy and the slow reconstruction of the great nations of the world upon an industrial basis. Such has been throughout the most noteworthy characteristic of social evolution.² Secondly, that as, from first to last, the end to be achieved by society in its corporate capacity is the welfare of its units, the ethical warrant for the coercion of the individual by the State, derived from the condition of war, disappears as war itself ceases, and cannot be alleged as holding for a condition of peace. And, thirdly, that those who seek to reverse the order of social evolution by re-expansion of the scope of State activity and power are endeavouring to fit down artificially a system belonging properly

¹ This is a truth upon which Spencer was never weary of insisting, and to which he returned in his very last book (see the essay on "Re-Barbarisation," in *Facts and Comments*).

² An interesting side-light is thrown upon this whole question of the gradual development of personality by such books as Sidney Lanier's *English Novel* and Mr. H. M. Posnett's *Comparative Literature*, in the "International Scientific" Series.

to one type of social structure upon the other type of social structure, which has all along been outgrowing it—are engaged, therefore, in a retrogressive enterprise, which is in the very nature of things foredoomed to disaster.¹

V.

But these conclusions, important though they are, do not represent the whole of the case. Not only during the course of social development does ethical sanction for State interference with the individual gradually decline, but the relinquishment of such interference is seen, from the evolutionary point of view, to be a necessary accompaniment of the increasingly adequate performance on the part of government of the special functions for which it is properly responsible.

Here we must revert to the principle of the physiological division of labour, already touched upon. It has been shown that repetition of similar parts, whether in an individual structure or in society, implies lowness of organisation, evolution being everywhere characterised by the complexity resulting from the multiplication of different parts fulfilling different duties. Beyond this it has been made clear that specialisation of function brings with it limitation of function. "At the same time that each part grows adapted to the particular duty it has to discharge it grows un-

¹ It is not by accident that socialistic schemes flourish most in a military atmosphere. In Germany, "where militancy is most pronounced, and where the regulation of citizens is most elaborate, socialism is most highly developed; and from the head of the German military system has now come the proposal of regimental regulations for the working classes throughout Europe" (*Justice*, § 26).

adapted to all other duties"¹—a truth exemplified alike in biology and in political economy. The application of this principle to the matter in hand is obvious. "The governmental part of the body politic exemplifies this truth equally with its other parts. In virtue of this universal law, a Government cannot gain ability to perform its special work without losing such ability as it had to perform other work."²

Hence we must meet, with a more definite answer than has yet been given or implied, the question, What is the special work of a Government?

We have said that the only ultimate sanction for social organisation in any form is the welfare of the individual units. Co-operation secures for all a larger and fuller life than each could secure for himself; and the business of the community in its corporate capacity is to maintain the conditions which make co-operation possible. How can it do this? By protecting the individual in such a way that in each case the fundamental laws of life shall not be interfered with; in other words, by securing that state of things which enables each citizen to receive the full benefit of his character and activities, subject only to the limitations necessarily imposed upon him by the presence of fellow-citizens having like claims.

That this, and this alone, is the true function of the State, is proved (though not only in this way) by the striking fact that, whatever may have been the other duties assumed or rejected by Governments in various places and at different

¹ "Representative Government: What is it good for?" (*Essays*, vol. iii.).

² *Ibid.* Compare the essay on "Over-Legislation" (*Essays*, vol. iii.).

times, this duty has never been overlooked. The earliest and the latest developments of social structure, differ though they may in every other respect, alike hold this end in view. Positive regulation of the citizen by the community has varied all the world over, and varies still in extent, rigour, and direction; negative regulation has uniformly been accepted, theoretically at any rate, as coming directly within the range of governmental activity.

This is clearly brought out by a comparison of the military and industrial types of society. We have seen that the relation of the individual to the community immediately depends upon the social structure evolved in response to average needs. Yet though, where the activities are predominantly warlike, the unit apparently exists for the sake of the whole, while where the activities are predominantly peaceful the whole clearly exists for the sake of the unit, in each case the ethical authority for State regulation, be this small or great, is ultimately the maintenance of the conditions pre-requisite to peaceful co-operation. During periods of antagonistic relations with other communities the main business of government, therefore, is to protect society from external enemies, internal regulation being wholly subservient to this special end. When, with the gradual cessation of war, this function lapses, there remains still the duty of maintaining the conditions pre-requisite to peaceful co-operation in other ways—namely, by protecting society from internal enemies. And now let us note the supremely important inference. In the one case, as in the other, ethical sanction warrants the interference of the State with the individual so far as is necessary to achieve

the object here set forth, and no further. As in the military *régime* no moral right can be shown to exist for State coercion of citizens beyond the point required for successful resistance to antagonistic societies, so in the industrial *régime* no moral right can be shown to exist for State coercion of citizens beyond the point required for successful resistance to antagonistic units; State functions are ethically limited to the maintenance of strictly equitable relations among the separate members of the community. Thus we come round from another side to the formula of abstract justice already given. Every man must be held free to do that which he wills, provided only he infringes not the equal freedom of other men; and the duty of the State is to guard each individual citizen from such infringement. When the State itself commits such infringement, therefore, it not only exceeds its duty, but it becomes actually guilty of that which it is its immediate and express duty to prevent.

Such, then, is the proper function of the State, and in fitting itself more completely for this the State necessarily, as we have seen, becomes less fit for anything else. In low, undeveloped forms of society the essential work of protection against enemies, internal and external, is performed with extreme imperfection, at the same time that it is encumbered with countless other kinds of work which do not appertain to government at all. But with social evolution progressive differentiation, while gradually relieving the ruling agency of these multitudinous extra duties, enables it to discharge its own particular function with ever-increasing efficiency. Thus the natural tendency is towards specialised administration—towards the production of a type of

government best adapted for the proper work of government, and *therefore* least adapted for any other sort of work whatsoever.¹

This doctrine has been called by all sorts of hard names, not only by avowed socialists, but by many "practical legislators" and "common-sense politicians," who, while they would be horrified at the thought of being identified with the socialists, are constantly favouring movements that are socialistic under the thinnest possible disguise. But it is safe to say that the majority of those who are so loud in their anathemas of Spencer's individualism are utterly unaware that it has anything but a negative side. Familiar with Spencer's unmeasured denunciation of State interference—denunciation everywhere backed up by long arrays of facts—they seem to think that there the matter ends. But there the matter does not end. The truth, already implied in the above considerations, and now to be definitely set forth, is simply this: that while Spencer protests against the continual meddling of Government with affairs that do not concern it, he advocates at the same time a more and more complete and conscientious discharge on its part of the business that properly falls within its scope. Hitherto, and at the present time, over-legislation, where legislation is not wanted, has inevitably been accompanied by under-legislation where legislation is sadly called for; things are regulated that ought to be left to take care of themselves, and, as a necessary consequence, other things are left to take care of themselves that ought to be regulated. Spencer always sought to

¹ See particularly the essay on "Representative Government: What is it good for?"

turn the scale to the other side—curtailing governmental activity in one direction, but expanding it in another.

In his conversation on "The Americans"¹ (October 20th, 1882) there is a passage of special interest bearing directly upon this point. "But we thought, Mr. Spencer," said the interviewer, referring to some remarks that had just passed concerning the relation of the individual to the community, "you were in favour of free government in the sense of relaxed restraints, and letting men and things very much alone, or what is called *laissez-faire*." "That," answered Spencer, "is a persistent misunderstanding of my opponents. Everywhere, along with the reprobation of government intrusion into various spheres where private activities should be left to themselves, I have contended that in its special sphere—the maintenance of equitable relations among citizens—governmental action should be extended and elaborated."

How often this contention was made by him careful study of even the more popular of Spencer's political writings will make clear. The question was one,

¹ Reprinted in the collected edition of his *Essays*, vol. iii.

indeed, to which he returned again and again.¹ Meanwhile, as it is not our purpose here to follow the general doctrine that we have outlined into details, we must rest content if we have shown that this positive view of the matter, so commonly lost sight of, is nevertheless of the essence of the whole. The object of this chapter, as stated at the outset, has been not to expound Spencer's social and political teachings in their particular applications, or to enter into any discussion of them from so-called practical points of view, but to indicate the principal lines of contact between them and the body of his thought. Enough has been said to prove that his individualism, so far from being artificially foisted on to the rest of his system, as even some friendly critics would have us believe, grows naturally out of, and, therefore, properly belongs to, it—is an organic part of his general doctrine of universal evolution.

¹ See especially the essays, already so frequently referred to, on "Representative Government," "Over-Legislation," and "Specialised Administration"; also "Political Institutions," *passim*; *The Study of Sociology: Postscript*; and *Justice*, chap. xxv., which last compare with *Social Statics*, chaps. xxi., xxii.

CHAPTER V.

THE ETHICAL SYSTEM OF SPENCER

I.

HAS the doctrine of evolution modified our conceptions of morality? Has it in any way helped to establish the principles of right living upon a firm, scientific foundation? These are questions that meet us on the threshold of such a study as we are to take up in the present chapter, and they must be dealt with before we can place Spencer's contributions to ethical science in their proper light, or understand their full significance.

The struggle of a new idea concerning the universe with the old ideas whose peaceful reign it disturbs almost invariably passes through two stages—a stage of positive antagonism and a stage of high-handed conciliation. At the outset it is war to the knife. Champions of the older order rush into the lists, intent on proving not so much that the new thought is untrue as that it is inexpedient. They ask the world not to examine the evidence, but to calculate the consequences. If the ancient cosmology is overthrown, and the philosophy of life so long based upon it crumbles to pieces as a necessary result, then, argues the reactionist, we know what we have to expect. The foundations of morality will be swept away; social disintegration will follow; religion itself will perish. A thousand pulpits take up the warning cry; the Press teems with hysterical vaticinations; strong voices are raised in argument or appeal.¹ Amid all the

angry outcry and popular confusion that ensues, the new thought holds secure its tiny germ of life. While men work, and wrangle, and sleep, it makes its silent way; and before the world realises the vastness of the change that has been wrought in its midst, the truth comes to be recognised as true. Then, strangely enough, we hear nothing more of the disastrous consequences that were to follow in its train. The moment for conciliation has arrived, and the attitude of the conservative is soon taken up. Where is the need of all this excitement? he asks. We all know the thing is true—in theory; but, after all, it is only a theory, and what difference does it make one way or the other? You are quite overrating the practical importance of the whole issue. The world is neither better nor worse for the revelation. The old religion is untouched, the old morality remains just where it was before.

Through these two stages of experience, no less than almost every other great theory that science has given to the world, the doctrine of evolution has passed on its way to general recognition. At first the Cassandra voices raised against it were of the loudest and the most persistent. The end of the moral cosmos was at hand. Natural selection was to give us a cold, bloodless system of unrestrained appetite, untempered egoism, unrelieved brutality, in place of the benign and simple altruism of the

powerful essay on "Morality and Theism" in his *Guesses at the Riddle of Existence*.

¹ See, for example, Professor Goldwin Smith's

Sermon on the Mount. The higher feelings were to have no further play; every quality that had beautified the life of saint and martyr and philanthropist was to vanish before the new gospel of the survival of the fittest in the universal struggle for existence. Every one for himself, and the weakest to the wall—that was to be the modern transliteration of the Golden Rule, with what frightful results to the humanity of the future it was hardly needful to specify.¹ The prophetic picture drawn was dire enough, it is true; the more wonder surely (for all this, let us remember, took place not at the period of the Reformation, but within the memory of men now living) that it has so soon been all but forgotten. For the intellectual offspring and representatives of these passionate opponents of evolution in the early years of its growth are anxious to have us know that they at least are not afraid of it. Why should they be? It was, as they now discover, implied in all their teaching long before the days of Darwin and Spencer; and, as a matter of fact, it adds nothing, one way or the other, to the discussion of

¹ It is perhaps worth while to notice that, in ethical speculations on the influence of the doctrine of evolution, survival of the fittest is too often taken to mean survival of the physically strongest. This, for instance, is the mistake made by Oliver Luttrell in Sir Walter Besant's *Bell of St. Paul's*; and his reasoning upon the subject is characteristic of a widespread error in general thought. The idea of the preservation of altruistic instincts by the selection of the groups in which these are strongest, and of the development of clan-sympathies and paternal feelings through the part these play in social evolution, never seems to enter the popular mind. Nor is the great fact commonly recognised that the qualities which ensure the survival of a society may not be of advantage to the individual, except that indirectly he gains or suffers with the group of which he is a unit.

the great practical questions of life. The end of the moral cosmos at hand? Oh, no; for evolution, though it may have thrown some new light upon biology, has nothing whatever to do with ethics. Any attempt to work it out into practical applications will only reveal its sterility. Let the scientists do what they like about it, then. We are not concerned. Our morality is still the morality of them of old time. Evolution has not changed it, not even in the slightest particular.

In what sense it may be maintained that there is a large element of truth in this sweeping declaration, as well as the careful qualification which it requires, will become clear later on. There is one point, however, that we may conveniently deal with at once. It is commonly and properly said that the whole edifice of modern science is founded upon the datum of causation. The belief in the uniformity of Nature and of natural processes is exactly that which all our investigation is widening, deepening, and everywhere making more and more secure; and so strong is the hold that it has already taken upon the cultivated mind, that it is now admitted on all sides, by those whose training in exact methods of inquiry renders them competent to judge, that there is no room left for the ancient theological conceptions of the causeless, the lawless, the arbitrary, in the material universe as it stands revealed to our ken. The persistent tendency of all evolutionary thought has been to emphasise this sense of the universality of law where it was already present, and to introduce it where it did not exist before. In this way, as a thoughtful writer on evolutionary morals has well pointed out, the doctrine of evolution has really contributed more to ethics than to the natural sciences.

These latter "at least recognised before the appearance of the theory of evolution the element of constancy ordinarily called law, and attempted to formulate this constancy as a basis of thought and action."¹ But in ethics no such systematic attempt had been made, morality being, indeed, expressly regarded as a region outside and above the domain of law. With the application of evolutionary theories to moral principles went for the first time the emphatic assertion that the connection of cause and effect must be taken to hold good in moral no less than in natural science; that, indeed, only on recognition of this connection is any science of ethics possible. While the evolutionary theory, therefore, only strengthened and deepened the conception of causation already existing in other departments of research, it may be said almost to have introduced that conception into investigations on the subject of morality. Something of what is meant by the great change in thought thus brought about we shall see presently. Here we may well bear in mind the fact that, if the doctrine of evolution had done no more than impregnate sociological discussion with this principle of causation, it would have made good its claim to have given ethics a new basis and starting-point, since in this way it has bridged over the wide chasm between a merely empirical and a truly scientific system of morality.

Meanwhile, that we have now reached a crisis in morals is sufficiently manifest, I think, to all who take an interest in the larger movements of the time. Be the influence of the theory of evolution

¹ C. M. Williams, *A Review of the Systems of Ethics Founded on the Theory of Evolution*, pp. 514, 515.

upon ethics what it may, the most vigilant and sagacious thinkers on every side acknowledge that the forces most deeply implicated in the changes that are gradually coming over the whole of our civilisation are carrying us to the verge of a moral interregnum. The supremacy of the older, theologically-derived sanctions of conduct is breaking down; and the danger, immediate and serious, is lest they should be generally cast away as effete and valueless before any other sanctions are established to take their place. At this period of transition, while, as Matthew Arnold put it, "the old is out of date" and "the new is not yet born," the world at large undoubtedly stands in peril of a moral collapse. Half-educated reformers, of more zeal than wisdom, in their anxiety to sweep away every vestige of what they fulminate against as the ancient superstitions of the race, are too apt to overlook the solemn fact, written none the less in letters of fire on every page of history, that the mere destruction of restraints and inspirations under and in virtue of which men have developed hitherto would mean not advance, but chaos. It is well enough to throw aside every husk of old doctrine; but may we not find ourselves sometimes in our careless haste discarding, along with much useless rubbish, some germs of vital truth that the world cannot afford to be without?¹ It is perhaps worth while to pause occa-

¹ The case of Lessing is here in point. Writing to his friend Mendelssohn concerning the rationalistic experience of his earlier years, he confesses that in "getting rid of certain prejudices" he had also deprived himself of some things that he would have to recover. "That I have not in part done so already," he adds, "is only due to my fear lest, by degrees, I should drag the whole rubbish into the house again."

sionally to ask ourselves such a question as this; and to remind ourselves that the emotions, upon which, after all, the larger part of morality finally depends, cannot without deadly risk be cut loose from their old moorings and set adrift upon the treacherous sea of chance, at the mercy of every current and squall. Upon the whole, when we remember the congruity that must, according to the evolutionary theory, exist between the creed of a people and their average needs, we cannot protest too vigorously against crude experiments and ill-advised tamperings with the world's heritage of traditions, especially when anything so sacred and essential as the mainsprings of conduct are concerned; we cannot too strongly discountenance the spirit of the rash iconoclast who cares only to sap the ancient foundations of moral faith, and has no principle of guidance to offer in exchange for what he is intent upon snatching away. In such an emergency the clear course is to let the work of destruction take care of itself, and see what can be accomplished in the far more difficult as well as infinitely more important task of reconstructing the bases of morality in accordance with the new thought and the growing knowledge of the time. It is the positive rather than the negative message of science that it concerns us to understand.

Clear recognition of this momentous fact led Spencer, while working out the *Synthetic Philosophy*, to depart from the regular outline as originally published, and to take up the last division—the *Principles of Ethics*—at the expense of several intervening portions of his scheme. In the preface, dated July, 1879, to the *Data of Ethics* (Part I. of the completed

work), he thus wrote in explanation of his course:—

I am the more anxious to indicate in outline, if I cannot complete, this final work, because the establishment of rules of right conduct on a scientific basis is a pressing need. Now that moral injunctions are losing the authority given by their supposed sacred origin, the secularisation of morals is becoming imperative. Few things can happen more disastrous than the decay and death of a regulative system no longer fit, before another and fitter regulative system has grown up to replace it. Most of those who reject the current creed appear to assume that the controlling agency furnished by it may safely be thrown aside, and the vacancy left unfilled by any other controlling agency. Meanwhile, those who defend the current creed allege that, in the absence of the guidance it yields, no guidance can exist: divine commandments they think the only possible guides. Thus, between these extreme opponents there is a certain community. The one holds that the gap left by disappearance of the code of supernatural ethics need not be filled by a code of natural ethics; and the other holds that it cannot be so filled. Both contemplate a vacuum, which the one wishes and the other fears. As the change which promises or threatens to bring about this state, desired or dreaded, is rapidly progressing, those who believe that the vacuum can be filled, and that it must be filled, are called on to do something in pursuance of their belief.¹

This paragraph makes Spencer's position perfectly clear. As before pointed out, his interests had from the first been practical; his earliest publications—the letters on the *Proper Sphere of Government* and the more mature work on *Social Statics*—had dealt with the actual problems of the day; and the desire to apply philosophic principles to the questions of social growth and the conduct of life subsequently inspired the *Synthetic System* itself. Properly speaking, then, all his other work led up to his *Ethics*; to leave that division

¹ *Data of Ethics*, p. vi.

untouched, therefore, would have been to leave his whole enterprise, comprehensive and valuable as it might have been as a contribution to the organisation of knowledge, in the condition of "Giotto's tower in the old Tuscan town"—a magnificent effort, yet "wanting still the glory of the spire." "My ultimate purpose," he writes in the preface from which I have just quoted, "lying behind all proximate purposes, has been that of finding for the principles of right and wrong, in conduct at large, a scientific basis." Naturally, therefore, he could not but feel that to allow this purpose to remain unfulfilled, "after making so extensive a preparation for fulfilling it, would be a failure the probability of which" he would not like to contemplate. Hence the persistency with which, amid much interruption from ill-health and some disturbance from other causes, he laboured at this portion of his task, and the satisfaction which he expressed when it was at length brought to completion.

II.

Properly to appreciate the place occupied by the work of Spencer in the general development of ethical thought, we must understand something of what had been done towards the establishment of a scientific basis of morality by writers who had preceded him in the field. This will bring out his relation to the doctrines of the so-called orthodox schools on the one hand, and to the theories of earlier independent thinkers on the other.

An intrinsic difference in principle has long divided all ethical investigators, no matter what their minor points of agreement or disagreement may be, into two great hostile camps, usually known as the intuitive or intuitional, and the

inductive or utilitarian. This fundamental diversity of view may be traced back dimly to the days of Greek philosophy, but it has acquired its immediate importance only within comparatively recent days. Through Cudworth, Clarke, and Butler on the one side, and through Hobbes, Helvétius, Bentham, and the Mills on the other, we can follow the main lines of divergence and antagonism down to the time when the doctrine of evolution entered the arena, and, offering a hand to each of the hereditary foes, led the way to a conciliation hitherto undreamed of.

The main questions at issue between the intuitionists and the utilitarians, difficult as they may seem in solution, may be very briefly stated. They are the fundamental questions of the ethical standard and the moral sense. What, in the ultimate analysis, is the standard or criterion of right and wrong? And, given that standard, how do we ourselves distinguish between them? Varied in detail as were the answers given by the intuitionists to these questions, they agreed substantially in this—that both the criterion of right and wrong, and our own power of distinguishing between them, are to be sought in an innate and divinely-implanted moral sense or conscience. The human mind was thus regarded as possessing an ultra-experiential faculty of judgment concerning conduct—a faculty which is itself unresolvable into any simpler elements, and beyond which there can be no appeal. Against this view it was the mission of utilitarianism to enter an emphatic protest. The followers of the inductive school refused to accept the alleged innate and divinely-implanted moral sense as anything more than a myth. For them our only test of conduct is the test furnished

by experience of the results of conduct ; and the so-called moral faculty or conscience, so far from being immediate and simple, is itself merely the organised registration in the modern civilised adult of his observations of the consequences of the actions of himself and others. Thus, from the standpoint of the intuitionist, virtue or right conduct is in itself not only a proximate, but also an ultimate, end ; while the utilitarian regards it as a proximate end only ; the ultimate end, which imparts to it its particular quality of virtuousness or rightness, being some kind of utility which it is held to subserve.

This, I think, is sufficiently clear. But as the point is of importance, I will supplement my own statement by a quotation from a distinguished historian who was himself an adherent of the intuitional view. The intuitional moralists, wrote the late Mr. Lecky¹—

believe that we have a natural power of perceiving that some qualities, such as benevolence, chastity, or veracity, are better than others, and that we ought to cultivate them and repress their opposites. In other words, they contend that, by the constitution of our nature, the notion of right carries with it a feeling of obligation ; that to say a course of conduct is our duty is in itself and apart from all consequences an intelligible and sufficient reason for practising it ; and that we derive the first principles of our duties from intuition.

The utilitarian, on the contrary, denies—

that we have any such natural perception. He maintains that we have by nature absolutely no knowledge of merit and demerit, of the comparative merit of our feelings and actions, and that we derive these notions solely from an observation of the course of life which is conducive to human happiness. That which makes actions good is that they increase the happiness or decrease the pains of mankind. That which constitutes their demerit is their

opposite tendency. To procure the greatest happiness of the greatest number² is therefore the highest aim of the moralist—the supreme type and expression of virtue.

These, amid many minor points of difference, not only helping to separate more thoroughly the two great parties from each other, but often breaking up those parties themselves into sundry more or less closely segregated clusters, may be taken as the most salient characteristics of the antagonistic schools. While they remained, in their older forms, the only important candidates for popular favour, the suffrages of the world were very unequally divided between them. Besides the rank and file of the various religious denominations, an overwhelming majority of the most prominent moralists, including practically all those belonging to the Christian Church, strenuously maintained the intuitionist doctrines. The transcendental nature of morality was the central principle around which men of the most diverse theological and social views were called upon to rally ; and the orthodox army, no matter how much its champions might be divided among themselves, thus presented a solid front to the enemy. The other side was never popular ; but it made up for this by attracting to itself some of the clearest-headed and most original thinkers of the

¹ This principle—the greatest-happiness principle, as it is succinctly called—is, of course, that enunciated by Bentham, the man with whose name the system of the older utilitarianism is most intimately associated. It will be found stated and developed in his *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, first published in 1789. The principle itself has from that time downward been the object of violent attack at the hands of the intuitional party ; but perhaps the keenest criticism that it has ever been subjected to is that contained in the *Data of Ethics*, chap. xiii.

² *History of European Morals*, chap. i.

time, making a special appeal to men of sceptical tendencies, as well as to those trained in scientific methods of investigation.

We need here touch upon those aspects only of the old intuitional-utilitarian controversy which will help us to understand what has been gained by the application of evolutionary principles to ethical theory. A glance at the positions respectively taken up by the two parties on the question of the moral sense will, for this purpose, place us at the proper point of view.

Let us notice, then, that the diversity of moral sentiments and ideas exhibited by different peoples, and by the same peoples at different stages of their growth, is a problem for which the intuitionists have never yet found a satisfactory solution. We are told that there are many religions, but only one morality. This is true in a sense, but not by any means in the sense intended by those by whom the phrase is currently employed. The statement, which indeed smacks suggestively of the attractive humanitarianism of the eighteenth century, might have passed unquestioned at a time when sociological speculation was so entirely untrammelled by any reference to fact that men like Morelly and Rousseau could discourse eloquently of a mythical state of Nature and a purely hypothetical barbarism, and indignantly ask an artificial society to contrast man as the product of civilisation with man in his primitive condition of freedom and happy innocence. But what might have done well enough in Rousseau's day will not do in ours. Progress in ethnological and anthropological research has given us the real savage in place of that creature of "an extinct tribe which never existed"—the savage of our imagina-

tion; and instead of arguing as to what uncivilised man might have been and (in view of our theories) ought to have been, we must now take him, whether we like it or not, as he has been and is. We have to remember that the intuitional doctrine of the moral sense is an inheritance from a period when practically nothing was known of the actual history of our race;¹ it was constructed in reference to supposed theoretic necessities, and not upon an examination of facts; and it would have been surprising enough, therefore, had it remained unshaken when growing knowledge brought it to the test of reality. Indeed, the only thing for the intuitionist to do is to follow the example of the Italian philosopher who refused to look through a telescope for fear of having his ideas of astronomy upset. An inductive study of the diversities of moral theory and practice, made possible by our modern science of comparative culture, not only destroys at once the old theory of the substantial uniformity of ethical ideals, but even justifies the assertion that there is no crime, recognised by us as such, which has not somewhere and at some time found its place in the catalogue of virtues, and no virtue which has not been officially condemned. Even in extreme cases the statement will be found to hold good. The murderous Fijian's only fear is lest he should not be active enough in slaughter to win the approbation of his gods; with the Egyptian, lying is honourable; the Turkoman's code prescribes theft. Nor when we compare civilised nations with one another do we find the

¹ "Inquiring into the pedigree of an idea is not a bad means of roughly estimating its value" (*The Nebular Hypothesis*).

results less significant. Polygamy, wrong in Europe and America, is right and proper in China, India, and Turkey; while infanticide, a practice that we hold in utter abhorrence, was not only common in Greece and Rome, but was even defended by the greatest ethical teachers of antiquity, Plato and Aristotle, who also held views concerning the relations of the sexes which we should look on as revolting. On any theory of a transcendental God-given sense of right and wrong, these facts present difficulties that, but for the overwhelming influence of preconceived ideas, would at once have been recognised as absolutely insuperable. An attempt has indeed been made to turn the edge of the objection by the contention that, notwithstanding such variations of sentiment and conduct, *some* idea of right and wrong is always present. But this assertion practically abandons the only position in the intuitional theory that is worth fighting for, since, in the first place, it allows the definite and clear-cut claim originally put forth to lapse into one too vague and indefinite to be of any real service; and, in the second place, it introduces the elements of education and environment—the very elements that the intuitionists are naturally most anxious to keep out of the account. If the conscience is, after all that has been said for it, nothing more than a plastic and capricious faculty, which, instead of being a permanent, infallible, and absolute guide, may be so warped and distorted as to prompt here to theft and there to murder, while in other places theft and murder take rank among the most heinous crimes, then what becomes of the divine voice within us? and wherein is the extra-experiential moral sense one whit more sacred than

any sense that might be acquired? Surely the oracles of God should speak with no uncertain sound, if they are to make good their claim to a divine origin and mission.

These difficulties in the intuitional theory early presented themselves to Spencer, though not till after he had practically committed himself to that theory in his published work. In the division of the *Principles* dealing with the Inductions of Ethics (where the whole ground of moral divergences is covered in considerable detail),¹ he writes:—

Though, as shown in my first work, *Social Statics*, I once espoused the doctrine of the intuitive moralists (at the outset in full, and in later chapters with some implied qualifications), yet it has gradually become clear to me that the qualifications required practically obliterate the doctrine as enunciated by them. It has become clear to me that if, among ourselves, the current belief is that a man who robs and does not repent will be eternally damned, while an accepted proverb among the Bilochs is that “God will not favour a man who does not steal and rob,” it is impossible to hold that men have in common an innate perception of right and wrong.²

Against the orthodox intuitionists, therefore, the utilitarians undoubtedly possessed a strong case, since the old claim concerning conscience as an extra-experiential element of the mind crumbled to pieces the moment it was brought to the touchstone of fact. But, though the labour of destruction was easy, the labour of construction presented perplexities almost as great as those which the intuitionists had found blocking their path. It was one thing to show that the moral faculty could not be regarded as simple, independent, and transcendental; it was quite another thing to present a tenable

¹ *Principles of Ethics*, Part II.

² § 191.

hypothesis of its existence, and of the authoritativeness it undoubtedly possesses in the mind of the average civilised man.

Hence, even in the hands of its ablest exponents, the utilitarian theory remained in a crude and unsatisfactory shape. The problem that it sought to solve, though rightly recognised by it as a problem within the limits of scientific investigation, was for the time being beyond the reach of its resources and power. The conscience is not original and independent: true; but, then, whence and how is it derived? That was the knotty question, to which the intuitionists naturally demanded a reply. Bentham, who, though not theoretically the founder of utilitarianism, first endeavoured to make utility the basis of a coherent moral system, was himself no psychologist, and never approached the problems of ethics from the psychological side; but several of his followers, notably the two Mills, saw this vulnerable spot in his armour, and attempted to make it good. The following extract from the younger of the just-named writers will probably give, in brief, the best specimen of the most advanced utilitarian speculation on this important point:—

The internal sanction of duty, whatever our standard of duty may be, is one and the same—a feeling in our own mind; a pain, more or less intense, attendant on violation of duty, which in properly-cultivated moral natures rises in the more serious cases into shrinking from it as an impossibility. This feeling, when disinterested, and connecting itself with the pure idea of duty, and not with some particular form of it, or with any of the merely accessory circumstances, is the essence of conscience; though in that complex phenomenon as it actually exists the simple fact is in general all incrustated over with collateral associations, derived from sympathy, from love, and still more from fear; from all the forms of religious feeling; from

the recollections of childhood and of all our past life; from self-esteem, desire of the esteem of others, and occasionally even self-abasement. This extreme complication is, I apprehend, the origin of the sort of mystical character which, by a tendency of the human mind of which there are many other examples, is apt to be attributed to the idea of moral obligation, and which leads people to believe that the idea cannot possibly attach itself to any other objects than those which, by a supposed mysterious law, are found in our present experience to excite it. Its binding force, however, consists in the existence of a mass of feeling which must be broken through in order to do what violates our standard of right, and which, if we do nevertheless violate that standard, will probably have to be encountered afterwards in the form of remorse. Whatever theory we have of the nature or origin of conscience, this is what essentially constitutes it.¹

In Mill's view, therefore, as in that of the other members of his school, the moral sense arises in each individual as the result of his own experience of the connection between actions and their consequences, intrinsic and extrinsic, immediate and remote. Observation of the direct and indirect pains entailed by certain evil courses of conduct, which we thus learn to avoid altogether, or to follow at our peril, together with the indelible impressions left by education and various environing influences during our early years, enter as most considerable factors into the building up of the complex moral sense; while an equally important, though more subtle, part is played by the principle of association. Pain and wrong action, pleasure

¹ *Utilitarianism*, chap. iii. In their analysis of the conscience the older utilitarians do not seem to have advanced much beyond the point reached by Dr. David Hartley (1705–1757), who introduced into the consideration of the moral sense the important element of association, which he was the first to apply systematically to the general phenomena of the mind.

and right action, are found in interconnection with striking regularity and persistence; whence, in accordance with the well-known psychological law, right and wrong, at first regarded only from the point of view of their consequences, come at length to have a direct power of appeal, and are sought or avoided, loved or hated, for their own sakes. Meanwhile, the abstract idea of rightness and duty is conceived as arising, like other abstract ideas, by generalisation from countless experiences of concrete cases of right and duty; while the sense of coerciveness or obligation at large is interpreted as a result, arising immediately and by association, of the influence exercised upon the growing nature by the rigid discipline and sustained authority of the organised society in which, and the governmental agencies under which, the civilised individual grows to manhood.

Now, it is hardly necessary to point out wherein this alleged explanation, suggestive as it doubtless is, must be regarded as paradoxically insufficient to meet the problem upon its most important side. While recognising to the full the power of education, environment, and association, we still find ourselves unable to understand how, within the lifetime of the single individual, the idea of virtue as a separate, independent, and self-existent conception could ever be generated out of and emerge from the mere personal observation of the persistent connection between certain courses of conduct and certain accompanying results. Serious as is the objection when thus stated, it becomes still more serious when we remember that the specified connection between right action and pleasurable results can scarcely be said to persist within the limits of our own

individual experiences with the constancy and regularity that the argument appears to demand. Could there ever in this way arise such a conception of absolute rectitude as that which Tennyson embodies in the famous lines:

“And because right is right, to follow right
Were wisdom in the scorn of consequence”¹

Simple or complex, innate or derived, the moral faculty, as we find it in the normal product of civilisation, acts, if not with absolute uniformity, still with an immediateness and average certainty sufficient to make us pause before endorsing any theory that refuses to take us further in the matter than the individual's organised experiences of pleasures and pains. The issue may be dealt with on the grounds of common sense. According to the utilitarian hypothesis, each infant born into the world starts absolutely afresh. The mind is a *tabula rasa*, with no innate ideas, no intuitions of any kind. Upon this the environment is supposed to work; and the simple question is, whether the organisation and registration of personal observations, impressions, and experiences during the comparatively few years of childhood and adolescence can be fairly taken to account for all that we know of the characteristics of the moral faculty as it exists within ourselves in the period of adult life? It is surely not strange that the intuitional school declined to answer this question in the affirmative.

¹ It may be pointed out, however, that even this superb declaration of virtue for its own sake does not invalidate the utilitarian *standard*. Those who think it does so must be required to answer the question whether they would hold any line of action to be “wisdom” which does not, at whatever cost of temporary or personal sacrifice, tend to the good of someone, somewhere, at some time.

The dispute between the two opposed theories of morals may, therefore, be said to have reached a deadlock. Each side had found the weak point in the other's system, while at the same time each failed to secure its own from attack. And now we are in a position to appreciate the flood of new light that was suddenly let in upon the whole controversy by the rise of the doctrine of evolution.

Notwithstanding all the profound differences that separated them, the two older schools possessed a single characteristic in common. Both had based their arguments and formulated their conclusions upon the conceptions of special creation and fixed types; and the discussion, with the full consent of both contending parties, had been in this way limited in range to the experiences of the individual life. Could the conscience ever have arisen after the manner alleged, within the span of the separate mortal career? This was the form that the issue had taken; and to the question in this shape one side had answered Yes, and the other No. Evolution at once widened the issue. Behind the individual it placed the race; behind civilised humanity, the ages of barbarism and animality, out of which, through untold centuries, we have been slowly and painfully struggling upward into higher developments of life. The problem was no longer that of explaining the fine sensitive conscience of the modern adult Caucasian as the outgrowth of a few years of personal intercourse with his environment. The gradually-acquired experiences of countless generations, slowly registered through long periods of social consolidation, and handed down from age to age as slight but persistent modifications in the

nervous organisation of evolving man—these were the new factors which the development theory introduced into the discussion. An explanation which had properly been condemned as absurdly inadequate, so long as attention was confined to the brief terms of a separate life, assumed, immediately that account was taken of the element of hereditary transmission, the appearance of a rational and complete solution of the problem. In merging the life history of each single generation in the life history not only of the human race at large, but of all sentient existence, and in postulating the thread of continuity that, running through almost imperceptible gradations, binds the highest forms to the lowest, the evolutionist at once secured a new standpoint, and escaped the obvious charge of extravagance or specious reasoning. In this way evolution, having, as we have already seen, reconciled the adverse claims of the psychological schools of Locke and Kant, now also stepped forward to make peace between the hereditary foes—the intuitionists and the utilitarians. It showed that in the interpretation of conscience each side had part of the truth, and neither side the whole truth. The moral sense, like what we know as instinct, while innate and extra-experiential in the individual, is acquired and dependent in the race.¹

¹ It is only just to notice that the claim for an original and non-derivative moral sense has been very differently interpreted by different members of the older intuitional school. Kant, for instance, by far the greatest thinker among them all, distinctly admits, in his *Critique of Practical Reason*, that the moral imperative, conceived by him as transcendental, is transcendental only as to *form*. The *content* is derived. In other words, it gives the general sense of duty or obligation; but for our knowledge of what constitutes right and wrong in any particular

The attitude of the evolutionary moralist, thus made clear, will be made clearer still by the following extract from a letter written many years ago by Spencer to John Stuart Mill, and subsequently published, in part, in the *Data of Ethics* :—

To make my position fully understood, it seems needful to add that, corresponding to the fundamental propositions of a developed moral science, there have been and still are developing in the race certain fundamental moral intuitions ; and that though these moral intuitions are the results of accumulated experiences of utility, gradually organised and inherited, they have come to be quite independent of conscious experience. Just in the same way that I believe the intuition of space, possessed by any living individual, to have arisen from organised and consolidated experiences of all antecedent individuals who bequeathed to him their slowly developed nervous organisations—just as I believe that this intuition, requiring only to be made definite and complete by personal experiences, has practically become a form of thought, apparently quite independent of experience ; so do I believe that the experiences of utility organised and consolidated through all past generations of the human race have been producing corresponding nervous modifications, which, by continued transmission and accumulation, have become in us certain faculties of moral intuition—certain emotions responding to right and wrong conduct, which have no apparent basis in the individual experiences of utility. I also hold that just as the space intuition responds to the exact demonstrations of geometry, and has its rough conclusions interpreted and verified by them, so will moral intuitions respond to the demonstrations of moral science, and will have their rough conclusions interpreted and verified by them.

Careful perusal of the above extract, while it will enable us to understand Spencer's emphatic protest, made earlier

case we have to still to go back to experience. This, of course, is a far less extravagant demand than that made by the average intuitionist, and, indeed, yields half the case to the utilitarian.

in the same letter, against being classed among the anti-utilitarians, will at the same time indicate those important differences which separate him from the older school, and to which we must revert directly. But, beyond this, it brings us round to a point at which we may touch again upon a question already referred to—the question as to how far it is true that the evolutionary theory has introduced any new elements into our ethical considerations. It will be seen that it has actually discarded neither of the two great contradictory doctrines that it found in possession of the field ; and in that sense, if by new we are to understand something absolutely unconnected with previous investigation, it may be urged that nothing new has been brought to light by its application to the problems of morality. But a new theory in science is seldom like a new fashion in dress ; it is rarely more than a modification, or adaptation, or re-interpretation, of some theory or theories already accepted in whole or in part ; and the revelation, when it comes to shake the world, most frequently brings nothing beyond a new attitude, a fresh adjustment of familiar ideas, or a sudden flash of light into some detail hitherto unperceived. The effect of evolution upon the older moral thought is a case in illustration. It came not so much to destroy as to fulfil. For it has placed the doctrines of both the intuitionists and the utilitarians on a new basis and in a new light ; it has harmonised their differences by showing their partial and supplementary character ; and by promulgating a theory of the moral sense which covers all the facts advanced by both sides, while it avoids the difficulties which each had found insurmountable, it has brought the whole

matter for the first time within the range of scientific treatment.

Nor must we overlook the substantial contribution that evolution has made to the discussion of the perennial problem of evil. The existence of this disturbing factor in the moral universe has, more than any other question, agitated the human mind from the time of Job downward, and with the progress of knowledge and the expansion of thought has given rise, in systems of theology and philosophy, to the most ingenious hypotheses and fantastic speculations. Evolution enables us to read at least some meaning and harmony into the turmoil and discord of the world. Here, again, the explanation it offers us is not marked by any absolute originality. Glimpses of the truth that evil is, so to speak, nothing but the friction due to the imperfect adaptation of human nature to social conditions, have from time to time been caught by thinkers of various schools. But their guesses and conjectures were of no scientific value whatever, and were at most nothing but faint adumbrations of that interpretation which the doctrine of evolution makes possible for us by pointing back over the long past history of our race, and tracing out the struggle of the pre-social instinct with the conditions of social life. The modern doctrine of human development, if it leaves the teleology of the subject still involved in the old mystery (since any question of *why* the particular line of progress brought about by evolution was necessary still remains, from the metaphysical side, entirely unanswerable), at all events replaces by a statement of fact and induction the nebulous theories formerly in vogue. The patristic dogma of the fall of man is banished to the limbo of outgrown superstitions, along

with all the Augustinian subtleties founded upon it; and what we have officially called sin, so far from having any supernatural causes or implications, we can now recognise as an inevitable accompaniment of the slow and painful adjustment of the natures of men to the circumstances and requirements of the associated state. The old Adam within us is the Adam of the pre-social stages of human history—the impulses of barbarism, the unrectified egoistic emotions of the dweller in cave and wilderness, which will from day to day burst loose and declare themselves, despite the long discipline to which mankind has been subjected through centuries of progressing civilisation. Every time we give way to such impulses the old barbarian rises within us, and temporarily reasserts his power. Scratch the Russian, and you will find the Tartar just beneath—so runs the proverb; and in the great mass of men the morality of civilisation is as yet hardly more than skin deep. As with the ship in Ibsen's grim and terrible poem,¹ our modern society carries with it a corpse in the cargo—the unbridled elemental passions, the brute instincts, the fierce anti-social tendencies transmitted to us by our far-off ancestors from the days before society and even humanity began.

What new significance is in this way given to the oft-repeated phrase which describes the criminal classes as the failures of civilisation! They are the representatives of the savage left over in the midst of our more developed life, guided by the savage's predatory

¹ *Rhymed Epistle*—a strange production, based upon the sailor's superstitious dread of making a voyage with a corpse on board, and written in answer to the question of a friend as to what is amiss with the present age.

instincts, living in a state of natural enmity with those about them, preying upon their fellows, to whom they offer nothing in return, and thus remaining unintegrated into the great organisation of mutual-dependent parts which constitutes society. The moral progress of man, as John Fiske epigrammatically put it, is the gradual process of "throwing off the brute inheritance." The law of morality thus becomes more emphatically than ever the law of the higher life; sin is degeneration, atavism, reversion to the pre-social or animal type; and the ethical ideal of evolution, in Tennyson's language, is to

"Move upward, working out the beast,
And let the ape and tiger die."¹

III.

The ethical system of Spencer, then, is hedonistic, or utilitarian, but not in the narrow sense in which the word "utilitarian" was formerly employed. The final criterion, as well as the ultimate end of universal conduct, is still happiness, pleasure, or well-being;² and

¹ *In Memoriam*, § 118. Tennyson, in whose poetry the fundamental conception of evolution continually appears, has given expression to the same thought in other places, notably in his later poems, *The Dawn* and *The Making of Man*. Such phrases as "slaves of a four-footed will" and "the ghost of the Brute that is walking and haunting us yet" are vivid poetic renderings of evolutionary ideas.

² The tendency of language is almost always towards degeneration, and it is sometimes a hard struggle to prevent our ideas from following our speech. It is unfortunate that the word "pleasure" has come to be generally used for the criterion and end mentioned above. The word is objectionable on account of its connotations; the idea called up is too limited in character, and has been seriously vitiated by evil associations. Happiness, though better, is still not wholly satisfactory. Perhaps "well-being," with its wider sweep of meaning and

in the last analysis that course of action, and that course alone, is held to be right which meets this criterion and helps towards achievement of this end. But while the utilitarianism of Bentham and the Mills was merely empirical or inductive, Spencer's utilitarianism is rational or deductive. We must emphasise this difference if we would appreciate the full value of Spencer's ethical teaching, considered on its scientific side.

All the old moral systems have, as we have already intimated, been uniformly characterised by non-recognition of the principle of causation. Whether the position taken was that the revealed will of Deity is the sole ground of duty (as maintained by the theological moralists strictly so called), or that our knowledge of right and wrong can come only through the instrumentality of a supernaturally-given conscience (as taught by the orthodox intuitionists), or that distinction in conduct arises by governmental enactment (as laid down in the political systems of Hobbes and his disciples), the implication was still the same. All these schools, so widely separated from one another at every other point, agree substantially in this: that they regard the rightness and wrongness of actions as qualities not necessarily inherent in the nature of the actions themselves, but impressed upon them by some extraneous and independent authority. Do we know that a certain action is wrong only because of a divine revelation through Scripture or conscience, or because of legislation directed against it? Then the statement implies that we could learn the wrongness of the said action in no other way—not even by observation of

absence of historic taint, is the best word for the purpose.

its results; and this is tantamount to saying that the action has not, in the nature of things, certain invariable consequences. But this leads us at once into an unforeseen dilemma. For if the supposed wrong action does not tend necessarily to produce certain evil consequences—that is, if its wrongness is not inherent, but accidental—then how are we the better off for knowing that it is wrong? The world might go on its way just as well, so far as present things are concerned, in the absence of the supernaturally-revealed or State-given knowledge, and all need for divine or legislative interference forthwith disappears. But if, on the other hand, the divine or legislative interference is supposed to be required because the welfare of the world will be furthered by the knowledge, then this means, if it means anything, that the evil action does tend to produce certain invariable consequences; and if this is so, then why cannot we study these consequences for ourselves, and reach a knowledge of the wrongness of the action by induction, or deduction, or both? Out of this logical labyrinth there seems no way of escape; and the whole difficulty arises from the fact that the necessary tendency of actions is overlooked—from the fact, in other words, that the element of causation in conduct is left out of the account.¹

Now, this weakness in older ethical speculations is precisely what the general nature of those speculations, and the intellectual character of the times in which they originated, would lead us to expect. But we are not so fully prepared to find the same weakness, though

¹ The line of argument adopted in this and the following paragraphs is worked out in detail in the *Data of Ethics*, chap. iv.

not in so pronounced a form, manifesting itself in the doctrines of the utilitarian school. Yet even in utilitarianism recognition of causation is far from complete.

And here we revert to a statement already made: that the older utilitarianism had not advanced beyond the empirical stage in its treatment of moral phenomena. Its method was that of induction only. When observations of the results of various courses of conduct have been made in numerous cases, and with sufficient care, a generalisation is possible, and the inductive statement is reached that certain actions do uniformly give rise to evil results, while certain others bring with them results of an opposite kind. Inferences from such a generalisation may then be taken as rules of conduct; since actions that have been followed by certain consequences in the countless cases submitted to analysis may fairly be supposed to have in themselves a tendency to produce those consequences. But here utilitarianism stopped. The important step in advance taken by Spencer lies in his attempt to convert the principles of conduct thus reached, from truths of the empirical into truths of the rational order, by showing not only that, as inductively proved, certain actions are habitually accompanied by certain results, but also that it may be deductively proved that in the very nature of things these results *must* go along with them. Only in this way can the element of causation be fully recognised; only in this way, therefore, can we have a science of ethics properly so called.¹

A passage in Spencer's letter to Mill,

¹ For Spencer's earliest discussion (interesting in connection with his later arguments) of the utilitarian system, see *Social Statics: Introduction*.

from which we have already quoted, will make the essential point in this discussion sufficiently clear:—

The view for which I contend is, that morality properly so called—the science of right conduct—has for its object to determine *how* and *why* certain modes of conduct are detrimental and certain other modes beneficial. These good and bad results cannot be accidental, but must be necessary consequences of the constitution of things; and I conceive it to be the business of moral science *to deduce from the laws of life and the conditions of existence what kinds of action necessarily tend to produce happiness and what kinds to produce unhappiness. Having done this, its deductions are to be recognised as laws of conduct; and are to be conformed to, irrespective of a direct estimation of happiness or misery.*¹

Perhaps an analogy will most clearly show my meaning. During its early stages planetary astronomy consisted of nothing more than accumulated observations respecting the positions and motions of the sun and planets; from which accumulated observations it came by and by to be empirically predicted, with an approach to truth, that certain of the heavenly bodies would have certain positions at certain times. But the modern science of planetary astronomy consists of deductions from the law of gravitation—deductions showing why the celestial bodies *necessarily* occupy certain places at certain times. Now the kind of relation which thus exists between ancient and modern astronomy is analogous to the kind of relation which, I conceive, exists between the expediency-morality and moral science properly so called. And the objection which I have to the current utilitarianism is, that it recognises no more developed form of morality—does not see that it has reached but the initial stage of moral science.

Reproducing this passage in the *Data of Ethics*, by way of general summary of his discussion of the utilitarian standpoint, Spencer adds:—

Doubtless, if utilitarians are asked whether it can be by mere chance that this kind of action works evil and that works good, they will answer, No; they

¹ The italics are mine.

will admit that such sequences are parts of a necessary order among phenomena. But though this truth is beyond question, and though, if there are causal relations between acts and their results, rules of conduct can become scientific only when they are deduced from these causal relations, there continues to be entire satisfaction with that form of utilitarianism in which these causal relations are practically ignored. It is supposed that in future, as now, utility is to be determined only by observation of results, and that there is no possibility of knowing by deduction from fundamental principles what conduct *must* be detrimental and what conduct *must* be beneficial.²

Such, then, is the foundation of Spencer's moral system, to the working out of which through the various departments of personal morals and social relationships the remainder of the *Principles of Ethics* is devoted. It will be seen that, upon the philosophic side, his contribution possesses an importance which it would be difficult to exaggerate, since he has at least pointed the way to a reconstruction of ethical theory upon a naturalistic basis; has offered an interpretation of moral development which combines what was true in both the older utilitarian and the ordinary intuitional doctrines; and has pushed beyond mere empirical hedonism to a conception of morality in which right and wrong, while still ultimately resolvable into terms of the bearings of actions upon life, are disengaged from any narrow calculation of results. But while the treatment of the problems of conduct from the standpoint of evolution has thus greatly clarified our theory of morality, the question may still be raised as to whether it has proved of any practical service. Spencer's own reply is contained in the preface to the

² *Data of Ethics*, § 21. For a further discussion of the relations between expediency-morality and moral science see the essay on *Prison Ethics*.

second volume of the *Principles of Ethics*, and expresses some disappointment:—

The doctrine of evolution has not furnished guidance to the extent I had hoped. Most of the conclusions, drawn empirically, are such as right feelings, enlightened by cultivated intelligence, have already sufficed to establish. Beyond certain general sanctions indirectly referred to in verification, there are only here and there.....conclusions evolutionary in origin that are additional to, or different from, those which are current.

But is this surprising? Certainly not. For apart altogether from the fact that the "right regulation of the actions of so complex a being as man, living under conditions so complex as those presented by a society, evidently forms a subject-matter unlikely to admit of definite conclusions throughout its entire range," the result is one which otherwise we might have been led to expect. The evolution of society has been possible only because little by little the natures of men have been moulded by association into something like conformity with the demands of the social state, and because conduct which makes for well-being has more and more been distinguished as right conduct, receiving the emphasis of those religious, ceremonial, and political codes which have preceded the true moral code, and, by establishing the conditions of harmonious co-operation within the evolving group, have in fact rendered the separate development of that code possible. Hence, the science of ethics, though it may in places correct, qualify, or supplement the principles of conduct otherwise reached, will for the most part only restate those principles in a somewhat fresh terminology, still further define their bearings, and interpret them more clearly and more emphatically by exhibiting their vital relationships with the evolution of life.

It remains but to add that affiliation of ethical questions upon the general doctrine of evolution leads Spencer to the assertion of some rather striking conclusions concerning the future moral progress of the race. We have seen that one of the fundamental doctrines of the *Synthetic Philosophy* is, that all things are gradually tending towards equilibrium; and as this must hold true in the super-organic no less than in the organic world, it results that the gradual adaptation of the natures of men to their environment cannot cease until between natures and environment a perfect balance has been reached. From the very commencement of social life down to the present time the tendency towards such adjustment has been slowly going on, and it is going on still, moulding the characters of men and women everywhere into more and more complete harmony with the sum-total of the conditions under which they live. What will be the ultimate consequence? "The adaptation of man's nature," Spencer replies,

to the conditions of his existence cannot cease until the internal forces which we know as feelings are in equilibrium with the external forces they encounter. And the establishment of this equilibrium is the arrival at a state of human nature and social organisation such that the individual has no desires but those which may be satisfied without exceeding his proper sphere of action, while society maintains no restraints but those which the individual voluntarily respects. The progressive extension of the liberty of citizens, and the reciprocal removal of political restrictions, are the steps by which we advance towards this state. And the ultimate abolition of all limits to the freedom of each, save those imposed by the like freedom of all, must result from the complete equilibration between man's desires and the conduct necessitated by surrounding conditions.¹

¹ *First Principles*, § 175.

The ethical corollary of all this, set down though it is in terms of rigidly scientific reasoning, is more optimistic than the brightest dreams of revolutionist or prophet concerning the ideal developments of our race. For this equilibration of emotions and conditions means that at length the adaptation of men's natures to the demands of associated life will become so complete that all sense of internal as well as of external restraint and compulsion will entirely disappear. Right conduct will become instinctive and spontaneous; duty will always be synonymous with pleasure; love will, indeed, be "an unerring light" and "joy its own security," as Wordsworth sang; altruism and egoism will so closely merge that altruism will be simply the highest egoism; and the interests of the individual and of the race will be so completely unified that the promptings and impulses of every moment will minister at once to the immediate and ultimate furtherance of the one and the widest and fullest realisation of the other.¹

¹ In regard to this adjustment of the moral nature to the conditions of life, see especially *Social Statics*, Part I., chap. ii.; *Data of Ethics*, §§ 46, 67, 96, 97; *Inductions of Ethics*, §§ 124, 191, 192.

It is true that in the later years of his life Spencer saw reason to qualify this sanguine prophecy; speaking not, as he had once done, of the "evanescence of evil," but more temperately of its continuous diminution under the discipline of the social state; and, while still believing in a "good time coming," regarding the consummation of moral progress as, at best, very far off.¹ Yet to the end he looked forward to an "approximately complete adjustment"² of the characters of men to the conditions of the highest possible human existence, as the goal towards which we are actually, if slowly, moving. The tendency of his philosophy in this respect, then, is distinctly encouraging. The doctrine of evolution, while, in Huxley's phrase, it provokes no "millennial anticipations," still assures us of the substantial reality of moral progress, makes us, therefore, feel that our own efforts count; and, by teaching us at once how little can be done to help the world forward, and yet how well worth while it is to do that little, helps us to combine "philanthropic energy with philosophic calm."³

¹ See *Autobiography*, I., 361; II., 364.

² *Principles of Ethics*, § 244.

³ *Study of Sociology*, chap. xvi.

CHAPTER VI.

RELIGIOUS ASPECTS OF THE SPENCERIAN
PHILOSOPHY

I.

IT is a curious instance of the gratuitous perverseness of popular judgments that, because Spencer was careful to mark out more clearly than any preceding philosopher the limits within which, from the very constitution of our intelligence, all our knowledge must be confined, his system should therefore have been pronounced a system of negations. Pulpits from which there never yet issued a syllable about his positive contributions to thought have rung with denunciations of his agnosticism; general readers who know nothing of the light that he has thrown upon so many of the practical problems and philosophical controversies of the day have their own pronounced ideas of his doctrine of the Unknowable—a doctrine which may, indeed, be said to have taken the place of the old so-called scientific, but really quite unscientific materialism, to which, as we have seen, he himself gave the death-blow, as the red rag of the modern theological world. How strange and wayward and purblind all this is it is hardly needful to point out. The development of the doctrine in question occupies a hundred and twenty pages, or less than a quarter of one volume of the Synthetic series—*First Principles*; and the chapters devoted to it represent but the clearing of the ground for constructive work, and pro-

perly form no part of the Synthetic System itself. Hence, even if we persist in treating the Absolute as a negation—which is precisely what, as we shall see, Spencer himself emphatically refuses to do—it is none the less manifest that to stigmatise the *Synthetic Philosophy* as merely iconoclastic is fundamentally to misconceive its whole character and tendency.

Here we will consider the Spencerian doctrine of the Unknowable not in its purely metaphysical, but in its broadly religious aspects; and we will approach the whole question of what we must predict as the probable future of religion by way of our author's speculations concerning religious development in the past.

The evolutionist, it is almost superfluous to remark, is prevented by his general theory of things from regarding from the popular point of view the highly elaborated theological systems of the world. The relatively pure theism of modern Christianity cannot be accepted by him as an immediate, divine revelation, nor can he consent to draw a hard-and-fast line between this and other great concrete expressions of the religious emotion, or even between this and those extremely low expressions of it which the culture-history of the human race has brought before us in such astonishing variety. All such manifestations, whatever may be their dissimilarities, must

for him remain manifestations differing in degree, not in kind, from one another; and, like all other phenomena, they have to be traced back into their simplest forms and studied in the light of their slow and gradual evolution.

The first question, therefore, to be raised is the question of the feeling that lies at the heart of them all—the religious emotion. As we cannot consider this, any more than any other faculty of the mind, as extra-experiential and innate in the race, we have to ask, Whence came it? What theory can we advance of its genesis and development?

In seeking an answer to these questions we find our way beset by many obstacles; not because the natural history of the phenomena involved is generically different from the natural history of other mental phenomena, but because it is here especially difficult to make sure that we understand, even approximately, the intellectual condition and outlook of primitive man. It is true that the monstrous and impossible barbarian of eighteenth-century fancy no longer haunts and confuses our speculation; it is true that we do not now wilfully read back wholesale into the savage mind the ideas and emotions that belong to our more developed state; yet, however much we may be on our guard, it is still hard to purge our thought of all trace of our advanced interpretations of things, and confront the universe in the only attitude possible to our distant progenitors in the long ages before the beginnings of civilisation. Till we can do this, however—till we can in a measure leave behind us qualities and tendencies that have become organised into the very woof and texture of our nature—we shall continue to commit the common

mistake of accepting, as original factors brought to light by our investigations, elements which in reality we ourselves have carried into our investigations with us; and this must inevitably, to greater or less degree, vitiate the entire course of our thought. Declining, then, to follow the still fashionable practice of using the more complex mental phenomena to interpret the less complex, we must make up our minds to deal with the whole question, not by analysis from above downward, but by synthesis from below upward.¹

Much valuable help in this direction has, during the past generation, been given by the careful and systematic study of existing savage tribes. Here, it is true, the difficulties are numerous enough,² for the ignorance, short-sighted-

¹ *Principles of Sociology*, i., § 316.

² All these are admirably exposed and commented on by Lord Avebury in his *Origin of Civilisation*, chap. i. Later in the same work, dealing specifically with the religious conceptions of savages, he writes: "Most of those who have endeavoured to account for the various superstitions of savage races have done so by crediting them with a much more elaborate system of ideas than they in reality possess. Thus Lafitau supposes that fire was worshipped because it so well represents 'cette suprême intelligence dégagé de la nature, dont la puissance est toujours active.' Again, with reference to idols, he observes that 'la dépendance que nous avons de l'imagination et des sens ne nous permettant pas de voir Dieu autrement qu'en énigme, comme parle Saint Paul, a causé une espèce de nécessité de nous le montrer sous des images sensibles, lesquelles fussent autant de symboles, qui nous élevassent jusqu'à lui, comme le portrait nous remet dans l'idée de celui dont il est la peinture.' Plutarch, again, supposed that the crocodile was worshipped in Egypt because, having no tongue, it was a type of the Deity, who made laws for Nature of his mere will" (chap. vi.). All this is wild enough of a surety; but is it much wilder than a great deal

ness, superficiality, and preconceptions of travellers, upon whom we have almost wholly to rely for our data, combine to render their testimony too often of doubtful worth, and the subjective element will persistently interpose its distorting influence. But the learning and acumen of writers like Tylor and Lubbock have done much towards clearing away our dangers and perplexities, and the conclusions established by them on many important points have enabled us to enter much more fully than was formerly possible into the recesses of the savage mind. This done, it remains for us to hold fast to the fact that the primeval man, whose mental condition and modes of activity we are trying to realise, is not to be thought of as on an intellectual equality with even the lowest of the savage tribes whose life is now to some extent laid open for our study. We may use these as convenient steps in our perilous descent, but we have to get down far below the level of even the wretched Bushmen, Australian aborigines, and Fuegians, before we can commence, by aid of the historic imagination, our investigation of the facts of the primitive human faculty.¹

In the experiences of creatures, then, who, intellectually and emotionally considered, differed from ourselves so radically and entirely at almost every point that it is only with the utmost difficulty that we can place ourselves provisionally

contained in the new philosophy of early religions offered to the world by Professor Max Müller and his followers among the comparative mythologists?

¹ In the first part of his *Principles of Sociology* Spencer has devoted a great many chapters to an elaborate detailed study of primitive man and his ideas. The works of Dr. E. B. Tylor and Lord Avebury (Sir John Lubbock) should be carefully read in connection with these.

upon their plane and in their attitude of thought, we have to seek for the earliest suggestions of the religious idea. But now, first of all, how for our purpose shall we define the religious idea? Some working definition, if only of the broadest and most rudimentary type, is necessary to begin with, and this definition must pierce far enough to the root of the matter to disentangle the idea itself from all its historic accumulations and developments. Writes Mr. Tylor:—

By requiring in this definition the belief in a Supreme Deity and of judgment after death, the adoration of idols or the practice of sacrifice, or other partially-diffused doctrines or rites, no doubt many tribes may be excluded from the catalogue of religious. But such narrow definition has the fault of identifying religion rather with particular developments than with the deeper motive which underlies them.

For which reason he very properly concludes that "it seems best to fall back at once on this essential source, and simply to claim, as a minimum definition of religion, the belief in spiritual beings."¹ Merely premising that such words as "spiritual" and "supernatural," when employed in this connection, must be held free from all their usual modern connotations, this definition may be accepted as our starting-point. "Belief in a being of the kind we call supernatural,"² with the feeling of wonder and awe which such belief tends to excite, is, in other words, to be regarded as the source and nucleus of religion. Widely as the countless concrete theological systems of the world may differ one from another, and from the fantastic and incoherent superstitions of savage tribes, in well-nigh every particular, such belief in some form of

¹ *Primitive Culture*, i. 424.

² *Ecclesiastical Institutions*, § 584.

existence and manifestation of power other than those which we describe as natural, and the emotions generated thereby, will be found invariably to distinguish and lie at the bottom of them all. It is such belief and feeling that alone furnish a bond of union between bodies of thought otherwise so dissimilar, for example, as nineteenth-century Christianity and East African fetichism; and, as being the residual qualities which fully and partly developed theologies without exception possess in common, they may be taken to represent the protoplasmic germ from which what, in a somewhat more advanced sense, is specifically called religion has everywhere arisen.¹

Setting out, then, from this conception, we find ourselves confronted by two separate questions. In the first place, whence arose the belief in a mode of existence and power other than our own? And, secondly, given this belief in its crudest form, what was the general course

¹ It may be pointed out that acceptance of this definition changes the issue in the old discussion as to the universality of religion. The discussion itself, from first to last, has been mainly one of terminology, the various disputants not being in agreement with one another, and sometimes indeed not with themselves, in regard to what they meant by the language employed. If we are to use the word "religion" only in some higher sense than that given it in the text, then doubtless Lord Avebury is right in concluding that sundry savage tribes have been and are without religion (*Origin of Civilisation*, chap. vi.). Yet it is very questionable whether any one of the tribes referred to by him in confirmation of his statement would be found entirely lacking in some faint sense of a life-power other than their own. Both Spencer (*Principles of Sociology*, vol. i., § 146) and Dr. Tylor (*Primitive Culture*, i. 425) favour the belief that at all events no tribe that has yet been fairly studied has proved to be absolutely deficient in some trace of religious ideas as thus defined.

of its early development? The answers given by Spencer to these questions will be found in his ghost-theory, or theory of the double, and in his doctrine of ancestor worship. All sense of the supernatural, according to his view, may be traced back to the primitive belief in the ghost; and all religious systems whatsoever, arising at the outset from such belief, have passed through the preparatory stage of ancestor-worship on their way to their more complex and highly-developed forms.

II.

The hypothesis formerly almost universally in vogue among those who sought a natural genesis for religious ideas was that early man was led by a sense of wonder and awe to reverence for, and direct personification of, the natural objects connected with his daily life. Sun, moon, earth, winds, sea, so mysterious in their behaviour, so tremendous in their power and influence, were thus supposed to be the objects which, by heightening of the feelings of astonishment and dread, gradually gave rise to the sentiment that we call worship. But poetical as is the theory, and congruous as its alleged experiences unquestionably are with the mental processes of our more developed state, the briefest consideration of the actual facts of the savage mind suffices to show its entire untenability. The primitive man had neither the emotional nor the intellectual tendencies requisite to produce the supposed chain of effects. The familiar sights and sounds of surrounding Nature, suggestive as they may be to the civilised adult, aroused in him no greater feeling of awe than they do to-day in the child or the village clown, who watches the rising and setting of the sun, the waxing

and waning of the moon, the ebbing and flowing of the sea, without the slightest impulse in the direction of worship. The religious promptings of which we ourselves are conscious as we stand in the presence of such phenomena are not primitive, but distinctively modern,¹ and, instead of helping, stand as obstacles in the way of our understanding of the emotional attitude of early men. So, too, with the intellectual side of the question. The savage accepts the natural changes that go on around him—day and night, summer and winter, tidal ebb and flow—with complete mental indifference, and as matters of course. He, like the ignorant and brutal among ourselves, has no curiosity. He does not speculate concerning them, he asks no questions about their meaning, seeks for no interpretation. He lacks, therefore, the very traits from which any possible system of Nature-worship would have to originate.

What, then, must we conclude? That Nature-worship is not the primordial form of the religious idea, but a developed form of it. Thus we have to ask—if our study of primitive characteristics, emotional and intellectual, forbids our accepting this commonly alleged explanation as the true one—what theory will that study enable us to offer in its place?

“The mind of the savage,” says Spencer, “like the mind of the civilised, proceeds by classing objects and relations with their likes in past experience.”² But while their minds work in the same way, the experiences which furnish the materials for their mental operations are

entirely different—being in the latter case almost infinitely varied, and in the former extremely few and circumscribed. While, therefore, the civilised adult is able to classify both objects and actions according to their essential likenesses, these being often among the least obvious of their characteristics, conspicuous likenesses, which frequently have nothing whatever to do with essential nature, alone attract the savage attention. A single illustration will make this abstract statement clear. According to testimony cited by Spencer, an Esquimaux has been known to mistake a piece of glass for a lump of ice. This error arose not because the mind of the Esquimaux did not proceed in the same way as the mind of an educated European—namely, by classing the new object with what most resembled it in past experience—but because, owing to his small and superficial acquaintance with things, this rough grouping of objects, in virtue of their most manifest external similarities, was the only grouping possible to him.

Passing over the discussion of the general theory of the outer world to which these limitations must necessarily give rise, we will concern ourselves with their influence only in the production of the earliest religious ideas. Consider, then, the interpretation that must be forced upon the mind of primitive man by the familiar personal phenomena of shadows, reflections, dreams. The notion inevitably suggested by them must be the notion of the duality of things. Watching his shadow, the savage becomes convinced that he is attended by a double, sometimes present, sometimes withdrawn. Observation of his reflection in the water strengthens this belief; and in both cases he finds

¹ Any sense of a spiritual relation with Nature is, as the study of literature shows us, of very recent development.

² *Principles of Sociology*, i., § 52.

evidence of the duplication not only of his own existence, but of almost all other existences as well. Knowing nothing of the physical causes of these results, he simply and naturally regards them as appended entities—which, however, possess the differential characteristic that they are visible without being tangible.¹ Hence the initial peculiarities of the double, or shadow, world. With these crude ideas combine ideas arising from the experiences of sleep. In dreams the savage finds himself engaged in activities similar to those of waking life. He hunts, fishes, and feasts, fights enemies, and goes through dangers; and these visionary occurrences are to him just as real as the every-day occurrences which they faintly or vividly resemble. What is the inevitable result? While all these dream-adventures have been taking place, his actual body, as he by-and-by learns from others, has been lying motionless and unresponsive. From this grows up the notion of the wandering double, or other-self, that goes away for a short time in dreams, and for longer periods in fevers, swoonings, and trances; and the identification of this other self with the appended entity, shown in shadow and reflection, is almost certain to follow. In this way develops in complete form the belief in the double or ghost—a belief which the testimony of travellers and missionaries, so far as it has hitherto been carefully sifted and examined, reveals as existing even in savage tribes among whom the

¹ Chamisso's well-known story of Peter Schlemihl—the man who sold his shadow—and Lamotte-Fouqué's *Saint Sylvester's Night Phantasy*, in which a person loses his reflection, are playful reminiscences of this primitive belief in the actual reality of shadows and reflections.

faintest trace or suggestion of any higher religious conception has been looked for in vain.

This belief naturally assumes special proportions in connection with the phenomenon of death. Temporarily withdrawn in sleep, fever, swoon, and trance, the double, or other self, is held at dissolution to take a final departure. Yet, though now permanently detached from the tangible bodily self, to which no effort can recall it, it has not therefore passed into a state of absolute non-existence. It has vanished into the shadow-world, carrying with it most of its earthly characteristics, but becoming gradually endowed none the less with growing suggestions of superadded power. By-and-by the surrounding world is filled with these shadowy doubles—the belief in ghosts thus generated surviving down to our own time in the vulgar dread of dematerialised existences that are supposed to haunt “the glimpses of the moon, making night hideous.”

Observe the natural result. A savage dreams of his dead father, brother, son. How does he interpret such an experience? As the actual visitation of the double or ghost of his departed relative. No other interpretation is, indeed, possible. Out of this springs the first idea of an after-life. But this after-life, as Lord Avebury has pointed out, is at the outset limited and temporary; savages are likely to dream, for the most part, only of the recently dead; and when a deceased friend is no longer dreamed about, he is no longer thought of as still existing.¹ Only later, along with the

¹ “Ask the negro,” says M. Du Chaillu, “where is the spirit of his great-grandfather? He says he does not know; it is done. Ask him about the spirit of his father or brother who

development of larger religious ideas, does this conception of the temporary after-life expand into the conception of unending after-life, or immortality.

But, meanwhile, belief in the surviving double, or ghost, exercises remarkable influence over the whole of savage life. It originates, in the first place, the practice of ministering to the needs and desires of the spirit. The universal rite of leaving provisions with the corpse finds its explanation here; sometimes, where the double is thought of as material, it is supposed to make use of such provisions in their material form; sometimes the more refined conception is that the ghost makes use only of the spirit of the things offered. Reason is thus also assigned for those continued periodical oblations to the dead of which travellers in different parts of the world have spoken, and which frequently persist, in more or less mutilated shapes, in the higher stages of advancing civilisation. But this is by no means all. In these primitive observances we may recognise the germ of all religious ceremonial. The father of the family, the leader of the tribe, the chief of the clan—men of exceptional prowess and power during life—become after death the objects of special attention. Their utterances in dreams are accepted as

died yesterday, then he is full of fear and terror; he believes it to be generally near the place where the body has been buried, and among many tribes the village is removed immediately after the death of one of the inhabitants." The same belief prevails among the Amazula Kaffirs, as has been well shown by Mr. Callaway. They believe that the spirits of their deceased fathers and brothers still live, because they appear in dreams; by inverse reasoning, however, grandfathers are generally regarded as having ceased to exist.—Lord Avebury, *Origin of Civilisation*, pp. 238, 239.

commands of unusual importance; their known wishes become the foundations of law; everything is done to retain their favour and to keep them friendly. Hence arises ancestor-worship as a necessary stage in religious evolution. Little by little, along with social consolidation, goes consolidation of these incipient religious ideas. The tribe is dominated by some one man of extraordinary strength and character; success in war attends his guidance, success within the clan follows his counsel. Dying, he assumes a correspondingly important position in the ghost-world—his spirit becomes the tribal god. His grave, and the rough structure raised around it for protection, initiate the temple; ministrations at his resting-place and propitiatory offerings upon the ever-sacred spot give rise to religious sacrifice; appeals to him for continued help are the first prayers; and in the praises of his great deeds, his courage, and his triumphs, recited or chanted within hearing of and to gratify his ghost, we may find the first indications of subsequent temple ritual.

To show how from these germs, *pari passu* with the expansion of thought and the general evolution of the social structure, there gradually grew up systems of fetichism, idolatry, Nature-worship, and other primitive bodies of theological thought, with their accompanying cults; and still more to trace from these the slow formation, in their first crude embodiments, of the great concrete religions of the world, would here take us beyond our limits. All this Spencer has done in detail, and with wonderful wealth of illustration. The following points are those which we have here to bear in mind. First, that our present method of interpretation seeks the origin of all

religious ideas, not, according to the common mythological theory, in feelings and speculations about the powers of Nature which are obviously beyond the range of undeveloped thought, but in the savage's inevitable experiences of the duality of his own and other existence; and that, consequently, all so-called primitive religious ideas are really not original, but derived. Secondly, that the immediate and necessary outgrowth of these experiences was the rise of a universal system of ancestor-worship, which in time originated a more or less complex pantheon of deities—ancestors expanding into gods, and mighty rulers and leaders into gods-in-chief. Thirdly, that all forms of theism, even monotheism itself, are reached by generalisation from earlier ideas, and are only possible when the mind has attained a certain degree of development. And, finally, that the course of evolution here indicated is to be held as marking out the line pursued by every religious system in its earliest stages—in other words, that we see no reason to regard any religion whatever as an exception to this general rule, because in its purified and highly elaborated form it may present no vestigial reminiscences of these primitive stages of its history.

III.

Acceptance of the doctrine of evolution in its application to thought obliges us to acknowledge that in the development of religious, as of all other ideas, there must at every stage be a certain congruity between the beliefs held and the intellectual and moral character of those holding them. If it be true, as has been pertinently said, that "an honest God's the noblest work of man," it is no less true that this noblest work

is only possible to noble natures in a comparatively advanced state of civilisation. An indigenous creed will always evolve in conformity with the average needs of a nation or tribe at any given time, and the changes it gradually undergoes—allowance being made for the subtle influence of interaction between belief and character—will be in keeping with the changing needs; while where a creed is imported ready-made from without it will inevitably, in so far as it enters into the spiritual life at all, find the level of general character and ideals—a truth never more strikingly illustrated than in the history of proselytising Christianity. And this forces us to recognition of the fact, not altogether easy of acceptance throughout the whole range of its implications, that "the religious creeds through which mankind successively pass are, during the eras in which they are severally held, the best that could be held; and that this is true not only of the latest and most refined creeds, but of all, even to the earliest and most gross."¹

This principle becomes clearer when we remember that early creeds are everywhere closely fashioned upon the existing social state; and since the social state is at every stage of its evolution the outgrowth of average needs, the creed itself is but the idealisation and embodiment of those needs, and throws the weight of its influence where for the time being it is most required. A religious conception greatly beyond the medium social demand would also be beyond the reach of the medium intelligence; though possible to one or two in a generation, it would be impossible to the large majority. Hence, the ideas

¹ "The Use of Anthropomorphism."

formed of divine affairs and divine government are at all times reflections of earthly affairs and earthly government: the divine ideal, in other words, is simply the projection of the particular social ideal then in vogue. Man has all along made God in his own image; and more civilised periods, inheriting the conceptions handed down to them from periods less civilised, find themselves entrusted with the task of modifying these older conceptions to bring them into general harmony with broader and purer ideals. "Ascribed characters of deities," as Spencer says, "are continually adapted and readapted to the needs of the social state. During the militant phase of activity the chief god is conceived as holding insubordination the greatest crime"—as it is then politically considered the greatest offence; he is commonly regarded

as implacable in anger, as merciless in punishment; and any alleged attributes of milder kinds occupy but small space in the social consciousness. But where militancy declines, and the harsh, despotic form of government appropriate to it is gradually qualified by the form appropriate to industrialism, the foreground of the religious consciousness is increasingly filled with those ascribed traits of the divine nature which are congruous with the ethics of peace: divine love, divine forgiveness, divine mercy, are now the characteristics enlarged upon.²

That all early religious conceptions are absolutely anthropomorphic, both in their positive aspects and in their limitations, is now admitted by all students of culture history; and we may here notice, in passing, the striking harmony of this fact with the general theory of ancestor-worship above outlined. Man was not only the primitive

type of deity, as Dr. Tylor has said; he was the primitive deity; hence necessarily the purely manlike characteristics of all early gods. At first scarcely more intelligent, far-seeing, courageous, or potent than the living savage who ministered to his necessities, the surviving double or ghost only gradually acquired transcendent capacities and powers; even the Jahveh of comparatively speaking so advanced a people as the early Hebrews being for a protracted period still markedly deficient not only in the higher virtues, but also in the higher intellectual qualities. Monotheism, or the conception of a single, all-powerful, ever-present deity, therefore comes at the far end of the evolution of religious ideas; which means, of course, that many popular theological theories, based upon the assumption of man's innate sense of the divine, require fundamental modification. But what we are most concerned to point out here is that, as Spencer has shown in the little essay on "The Use of Anthropomorphism," from which we have already quoted, anthropomorphism, even in its crudest and grossest forms, has had its relative justification, since it has played an important part in the higher development of the race. The savage nature, needing strong checks, can most effectually be controlled by fear of the still more savage deity. The conception must be entirely concrete to enter as a moral motive into his action; and thus even the most repulsively diabolical characteristics aid in the production and preservation of restraints, which, not otherwise obtainable, help, like the iron hand and will of the earthly despot, to prepare the way for milder discipline. Something may in this way, therefore, be said even for what Oliver Wendell Holmes called the "diabology"

² *Ecclesiastical Institutions (Principles of Sociology, Part VI.), § 656.*

of mediæval theology, and much for many of the harsher elements in the popular religious teachings of our own day. They yield important regulative factors in the lives of those for whom restraints and sanctions derived from more abstract doctrines would have no authority; and they could not be universally swept away, even if that were possible, without the most disastrous results. The only danger is that, through the influence of natural religious conservatism and intellectual vested interests, the old conceptions may survive the period of their beneficial activity. Then they become not aids, but hindrances, to further progress—obstacles in the way of that adjustment to which all evolution tends.¹

¹ Recognition of the average congruity between men's beliefs and their needs must not blind us to the fact that all lower religious ideas are extremely tenacious of life, and tend to persist, with untold influences for evil, in face of advancing civilisation. The task of eliminating the worst features in the body of theological doctrine remaining over from the past is, in some respects, the most important that each generation has to undertake; and how difficult it generally proves is shown by the ever-renewed struggle between so-called heterodoxy and so-called orthodoxy, trials for heresy, and other similar phenomena. It seems to me that Spencer himself was inclined to overlook or underrate this dynamic aspect of the matter, as he was unquestionably inclined to overlook or underrate the dynamic aspect of social evolution in general. Meanwhile there is another thought that may be pertinently suggested. We speak too often of civilisation as if it were a tide rising with something like uniformity all along the shore. We forget that in every country, at every period, stages of civilisation overlap—that there are still to be found among ourselves representatives of every epoch in the world's history, from the age of barbarism down to our own time. Appreciation of this fact should prevent a confusion of issues which, sometimes overtly, sometimes in partly disguised form, will be found to vitiate

IV.

The principle that anthropomorphism lies at the root of all early religious conceptions, interesting as it is for students of culture-history, is here referred to not for its own sake, but for its important implications in relation to the higher progress of theology. For the fact now to be recognised is, that even the most advanced theological systems of the world have not yet fully outgrown this earliest universal stage. Modern Christian theism itself, even in its purest forms, is still anthropomorphic theism—is still substantially an attempt to construct a philosophy of deity on the

most discussions on present-day religious affairs. It is too often assumed to be an objection against a high religious creed that it is not applicable to every class of the community, and particularly that it does not go straight home with regenerating force to the lowest and most degraded characters. Hence, comparisons are instituted in all solemnity between the more refined faiths of cultivated thinkers and the grosser doctrines of certain evangelical schools, and invariably in favour of the latter, because they have succeeded in reaching some whom the more refined faiths in question have never been able to touch! All that needs to be said in answer to this extraordinary argument is that every stage of culture, even in the midst of developing civilisation, must have its corresponding form of religion; but that we object to regard the doctrines that morally prove the most influential in certain cases as therefore possessing the more essential religious vitality. The counterpart to the common error now referred to—an error repeated in many circles with offensive implications—is the scarcely less widely-spread tendency of well-meaning and cultivated men and women to believe in the amelioration of the lowest classes through immediate contact with high religious ideas that properly belong only to the intellectual and moral level of far more developed natures. We can never reiterate too strongly that, in the nature of things, no creed can resemble a patent medicine and suit all cases.

basis of human qualities and human powers.

The history of the slow and painful advance of theology from lower to higher forms has been throughout the history of gradual de-anthropomorphisation.¹ One by one the distinctively manlike characteristics have been dropped from the conception of God, and those remaining have been expanded to more than manlike proportions. These changes, it is almost needless to say, have corresponded with the progress of men towards higher social and individual ideals, and thus we find, as we should expect, that the passions and proclivities first winnowed out and repudiated are those which belong to the stages of barbarism now left behind. The savage trait of cannibalism does not, in the conception of the god, long survive the habit of cannibalism in any tribe, and deception, fraud, and cruelty do not continue to be predicated of deity when truthfulness and mercy come to be recognised as qualities appertaining to higher manhood. "Our doctrinal teachers," wrote Dr. Holmes, "are unmaking the Deity of the Westminster Catechism, and trying to model a new one, with more of modern humanity, and less of ancient barbarism, in his composition." At the same time, the limitations of human faculty are broken down in the image formed of the Divine Being. God is thought of no longer only as very powerful, very far-seeing, very good, but as powerful, far-seeing, good, in degrees altogether transcending human possibility—and finally as infinitely so. And now

observe that, as each new step in advance is taken, as one by one the imperfect moral qualities are allowed to lapse, and the conception is ennobled and expanded on every side, every generation looks down upon those who continue to cling to the outgrown ideas with feelings of astonishment, or pity, or disgust. The Christian theist is horrified at the suggestion of the cannibal deity of the Fijians; the modern defender of orthodoxy finds much that is repulsive with little that is admirable in the despotic and tyrannical God of mediæval theology; yet, throughout, the conception is that of idealised humanity. Even in the very loftiest theological teachings this still holds true. The moral qualities are infinitely purified—the intellectual qualities infinitely developed; but the difference is one of degree only, and not of kind. The qualities are human qualities still.

But must we rest here? Is anthropomorphic theism, even in its ultimate form, the final outcome of the religious idea? Is man, too long accepted by himself as *πάντων μέτρον*, the measure of all things, to set himself up permanently as the type of Deity? Or may we not rather suppose, looking back over the course of religious evolution in the past, and humbly acknowledging the possibility of continued evolution in the future, that mankind may still reach conceptions of the Absolute Reality as much higher and purer and nobler than the now current conceptions of Deity, as these in their turn are higher and purer and nobler than the superstitions of the savage?—that the purgation of the merely human characteristics may still continue, till at length all thought of the manlike shall be entirely banished from our idea of God?—that, in other words,

¹ For this useful, if somewhat formidable-looking, word we are indebted to the late John Fiske.

anthropomorphic theism, when brought to its highest degree of purification, may yet lead the way to religious ideas compared with which all thoughts of Deity that men have hitherto entertained will seem crude and gross?¹

We shall best approach these questions from the negative side—by considering first of all the impossibility of continuing to think of the noumenal existence in any terms of human existence, no matter how high and pure these may be.

Theologians, metaphysicians, and all those who have in any way concerned themselves with the ultimate problem of the universe, have agreed to define the First Cause of all things as both infinite and absolute. To this, indeed, they are driven, to avoid becoming entangled in meshes of difficulty and self-contradiction from which there is no escape. But, as a matter of fact, they escape Scylla only to fall into Charybdis. Verbally intelligible though their proposition may appear, it becomes totally unintelligible the moment we press close upon the meanings of the words employed, and endeavour to frame conceptions answering to the phraseology. For, in the first place, how can we think of an absolute cause? Absolute is that which exists out of all relation; while a cause can only be conceived as such in relation to its effect. Cancel the thought of effect, and you cancel the thought of cause. To speak of absolute cause, therefore, is

¹ No student of early religious thought can afford to overlook Browning's wonderfully subtle analysis of anthropomorphism in his *Caliban upon Setebos*. Perhaps the only needful commentary upon this extraordinary production is the motto which the poet himself chose for it from the Psalms, and which sufficiently indicates his point of view: "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such a one as thyself."

to attempt to unite the ideas of non-relative and relative—which is manifestly an impossibility. "We attempt," wrote Dean Mansel, whose arguments on this question were freely drawn upon by Spencer, and are here reproduced from the pages of *First Principles*,

to escape from this apparent contradiction by introducing the idea of succession in time. The Absolute exists of itself, and afterwards becomes a Cause. But here we are checked by the third conception, that of the Infinite. How can the Infinite become that which it was not from the first? If causation is a possible mode of existence, that which exists without causing is not infinite; that which becomes a cause has passed beyond its former limits.²

To pursue this subject further would be to commit ourselves to an unwarrantable digression into the domain of metaphysics. Observing simply that, as here shown, while it is impossible to think of the First Cause as finite and relative, it is equally impossible to frame any conception of it as infinite and absolute, we will pass on to notice that, even waiving these insuperable difficulties, others not less formidable stare us in the face. A large part of dogmatic theology is taken up with the discussion of the "attributes" of God. Yet it is easy to show not only that the various attributes so confidently ascribed to Deity are mutually destructive, and therefore cannot possibly be thought of together, but also that the conception of none of them can be made to combine with the conceptions of infinite and absolute, which for the sake of the argument we will consent for the moment to accept.

The question of the relation of God's "moral character" to his knowledge and his power introduces us to a familiar

² *Limits of Religious Thought*, quoted in *First Principles*, § 13.

dilemma of old standing. We can think of a man as being at once very good and very wise and very powerful; but when we attempt to carry these qualities to an infinite degree, and at the same time bear in mind the actual history and condition of the world, we find ourselves entangled in a problem that has already shaken so many noble minds. Evil and suffering exist; they belong, so far as we can see, to the very texture of universal life; and even under the hands of the rhapsodical Mr. Drummond, the history of the evolution of life remains a history of wholesale carnage and cruelty. Now, God must have foreseen all this before the creation of the world, or he cannot be omniscient. But if he foresaw it, he must have been able or not able to prevent it. In the former case, though all-powerful, he cannot be all-good; in the latter, though all-good, he cannot be all-powerful. To think of God, then, as at once all-wise, all-powerful, and all-good is clearly an impossibility. Here is the ancient stumbling-block—the ever-recurring problem which no amount of inquiry into the “purposes of the Creator” has ever yet enabled or ever will enable theology to meet with a satisfactory solution. To reconcile the sin and misery of the world with the infinite power, goodness, and wisdom of a Deity conceived in terms of human powers and feelings, remains to-day, as it has been from the first ages of monotheism, one of the great unread and unreadable enigmas of speculation. Here we hand it back to the theologians, who have made it their own by pre-emption, and who are indeed responsible for its existence. *Non nostrum tantas componere lites.*

For the whole difficulty, let it be understood, is not, as is too often assumed,

a difficulty created by the blasphemous cavilling of those who refuse to accept, in lieu of explanation, the verbal jugglery of metaphysical special pleading. It inheres in the very nature of anthropomorphic theism; and if blasphemy there be in the matter, the charge lies, as John Fiske very properly pointed out, at the door of those who seek to maintain the anthropomorphic hypothesis. Hence the gain achieved by showing that this hypothesis is untenable. To do this we have to prove that, as above stated, beyond the fact that we cannot combine the ideas of infinite goodness, power, and wisdom in our conception of Deity, lies the further (less obvious but more significant) fact, that no “attribute” whatsoever can possibly be thought of in connection with Absolute and Infinite Existence.

To define God is to deny him, said Spinoza; and the veriest tyro in logic knows that definition involves circumscription. Yet upon definition have theologians from time immemorial expended their subtlest powers, with the result that they have succeeded in producing, in Matthew Arnold's famous phrase, nothing but a non-natural, magnified man. For their definitions are verbal only—they elude us the instant we endeavour to turn them into thought. We are told, for instance, that God is an Infinite Personality. But if we cannot think of an infinite cause, still more clear is it that we cannot think of an infinite personality. Personality implies limitation, or it means nothing at all. To talk of an Infinite Person, therefore, is to talk of something that is at once infinite and finite, unconditioned and conditioned, unlimited and limited—an impossibility. So is it with every quality related to personality. Theology