

ARTICLE II.

THE KNOW-NOTHING POSITION IN RELIGION.

BY JAMES T. BIXBY, PROFESSOR OF RELIGIOUS PHILOSOPHY AT MEADVILLE
THEOLOGICAL SCHOOL.

AT the threshold of the investigation of the special problems presented by the relations of science to religion there lies the preliminary question : What can we know in religious things, and how ?

This is properly a question of pure metaphysics, with which science has nothing to do, and there ought not to be upon this point any conflict between the scientific and the religious world. Science may properly declare what she has learned and how she has learned it. But when she proceeds to determine what and how alone it is possible to know anything, and engages in analyses of consciousness, in investigations of the laws of thought, and clumsily would spin again, over the eyes of faith, the subtleties of Hume and Kant, then it is evident that science has strayed into the realm of metaphysics and is trying "her prentice hand" upon the problems of philosophy.

Nevertheless, though but an interloper and a neophyte herself in this field, or rather just for this reason, Science has of late assumed absolute authority in the domain of the knowable, and has summarily ordered religion into close confinement. The brilliant successes of modern science, — recalling all wonders of the romancers, seven-leagued boots, lamp of Aladdin, wand of fairy, or what not, — these marvellous achievements have made her believe that her favorite methods are the only ones by which anything is to be known. He who would build up solid structures of fact, not air-castles of thought, must work by observation, induction, and verification. He must concern himself, so science orders, only

with what is discernible by sense, and must ignore the supra-sensible. All that we can know is phenomena. Realities can never be reached. Things in themselves are far beyond our knowledge. The idea of immaterial spirit must be assigned, as Vogt commands, to a place among speculative fables. Substance, essence, soul, — these are but high-sounding terms which cover so many chimeras. Certainly, it is urged, it is not for man to know God. It is not for the finite to think to find out the Infinite. All conceptions involving infinity, — such as creation, self-existence, eternity, absolute reality (Herbert Spencer labors at length to show in his *First Principles*), — involve the inconceivable; and though by our familiarity with the sounds we may think we understand them, they are really but “pseudo-ideas, symbolic conceptions of the illegitimate order”; “the power which the universe manifests is utterly inscrutable,” a conclusion to which Professors Huxley and Tyndall give repeated and emphatic “Amen.” When the question is asked, “Who made the universe?” Professor Tyndall replies “As far as I can see, there is no quality in the human intellect which is fit to be applied to the solution of the problem. It entirely transcends us.”

Science thus denies to religion a foothold in the realm of the knowable. The objects which she would worship are banished into an impenetrable darkness, and all that is left for her is to cover her head and veil her face before the mysterious realm. In the solemn emotions of the heart she may indulge herself freely, if she likes; but she must not presume to fashion the vague thought of that which she reveres into any definite shape. She must not venture to speak of that which she adores as if it were in any sense known to her. “The only language concerning the divine,” as Renan says, “that does not degrade God is silence.”

There is in this attitude a semblance of a deeper religiousness. Spencer calls it “the true humility”; Renan, “the effect of a profound piety trembling lest it blaspheme.” But it is in truth, the subtlest and most dangerous attack on

religion. The old fashioned atheism said bluntly, "There is no God," and the extremity of its folly was its own refutation. The infidelity of to-day says, "Whether or not there is any God, we can know nothing at all about him, and so ought not to waste our time by taking him into consideration. If it pleases you, however, to embrace with the deepest longings of your nature this blank mystery; if, debarred from knowing, you find consolation nevertheless in the exercise of your creative faculties, in fashioning the mystery in accordance with your words, why then," say Tyndall and Huxley, "do so; only have regard enough for propriety and the exclusive prerogatives of science to confine your worship to that of the silent sort at the altar of the unknown and the unknowable."

Practically, I see little difference between this theory of spiritual nescience and outright denial of spiritual existence. The assurance that we are, and must always remain, in dense ignorance of spiritual things kills the hope of heaven and the reverence for the Divine. It takes from conscience its authority, and withers every religious emotion. Who can worship an absolute darkness, an utter silence? If the Absolute Reality be utterly inscrutable there is no reason to think of it under one aspect more than any other. It may as likely be cruel as kind, contemptible as venerable, vile and treacherous as majestic and faithful. If we ought to revere it, there ought to be something in it cognizable as worthy of reverence. Why, if it be utterly unknowable, should we not hate it as rightly as love it, despise it instead of adoring it? To make God a name sweeter, grander, more venerated than all others, it must be more than a piece of blank paper. To build that temple of religion where songs of praise and thanksgiving, aspirations for a better life, hopes of a brighter and eternal home, and vows of solemn consecration spontaneously spring from the heart and ascend worthily and not in bitter mockery, we need other material than an eye-blinking fog-bank.

That know-nothingism in religion, then, which certain scientific cliques would establish, has not the first shred of a

claim to be considered its best friend. As little claim has it to be founded on truth or clear ideas. It is true enough that no sense-observation can show us spiritual things. But neither does sense restrict itself to the horizon of the visible, the tangible, and the sensible. Tyndall justly speaks of "that region inaccessible to sense, which embraces so much of the intellectual life of the investigator." When that which the microscope fails to see is regarded as non-existent, "then I think," he says, "the microscope begins to play a mischievous part," and he proceeds to point out many cases where structure and structural changes must be believed to exist although the microscope can make nothing of them.

As it is in mineralogy and biology, so is it in chemistry, thermo-dynamics, and optics. What is the whole of these, as systematized sciences, built upon? Upon the assumption of the existence of the molecule, the atom, and the ether. Yet of these units of matter how many have been isolated, separately weighed, measured, or touched? Of their ceaseless motions how many have been felt or seen? Of this omnipresent ether, some eleven trillion times, or more, as extensive as ordinary matter, how many particles, what smallest quantity, has been observed? Not one. The largest molecule, it is calculated, is a thousand times smaller than any particle the microscope can separately discern.

Again, please tell us, Mr. Scientist, why it is that in any case that you choose of outward observation, you trust the report of your senses as assuring you of any outward fact? You assume that when your senses observe or verify anything then you have something you can confide in. Why so? Do you say that you have learned from experience on other occasions that the impressions of your senses are correctly conformed to the permanent something impressing them? But really it does not establish this permanent something as outside of yourself. It may be, perhaps, only a coherent abiding group of subjective sensations. In reality no experience of the correctness of the sense upon other occasions, however many, suffices to show that it was not wrong in this. A certain ante-

cedent and a certain consequent may have been connected for a hundred million of times, and yet the next time (a possibility of which Mr. Babbage's calculating machine furnishes an actual instance) the consequent may be different. So far from this trust in our senses being furnished by experience, it is what always does and must precede experience. It is what alone makes experience possible and shows it to be applicable. As Professor Huxley has acknowledged, this trust in the veracity of our senses at the very moment that we make the sensory observations is but an assumption, and when that moment has passed, it is but an "unverifiable hypothesis."¹ Why, then, do we make such an assumption, such an "unverifiable hypothesis"? Because of the mental need, because it is an intuition of our reason, or, as Professor Bain calls it, "the foremost of the instinctive tendencies of the mind." Again, before the physicist considers that he really understands the object that he has found, before he has any true scientific knowledge of it, he feels that he must classify it, refer its phenomena to some law in accordance with which it takes place, some force that has produced it. Why is this? Again it must be answered, it is from a mental need, the instinct of natural order, of constant derivation of effect from cause.

It is the intuitive principle, then, that in science supplies the cement that binds the loose fact-grains of observation into coherent and valuable structures. The lowest stories of the scientific temple cannot be built up without this, and the higher still more demand it. The discerning physicist must recognize that the grandest victories of science are those which it has won by the aid of the imagination over the bounds of the visible. Geometry, e.g. is throughout a work of mental architecture, grounded upon and guided by pure mental insight of space. Had geometrical truths required for their acceptance demonstration from observation we should have known hardly a single proposition. An exact right-angle has no existence as matter of experience. A

¹ March Popular Science, 1875, p. 596.

perfect sphere is unattainable in practice. Arithmetic, algebra, astronomy, are ideal constructions, resting on the metaphysical conception of number, and nowhere conforming to exactly ascertained fact. In electricity, magnetism, thermodynamics, the subtile analyses of modern investigators have banished altogether the former theories of material fluids, and substituted the conception of invisible forces. The power that moulds the crystal, that lies in the magnet, that moves along the electric wire, can be seen only by the mental eye. Observed facts form, of course, the starting-point of knowledge, but they do not constitute its limit. Reason is not to be chained around the ankle with retorts and balances, like a convict with ball and chain. The wise *savant* must admit, as the distinguished Bertholet expressly has done, that "there may be something else to conceive, without knowing it experimentally, than connections of phenomena, and that outside the limits where positive science asserts itself it may be possible, without excess of mysticism, to perceive the outlines, and to trace the sketch of a certain ideal science where first principles, causes, and ends find their place, and legitimately support it." "It is not," in truth, as Caro has well said, "the new fact which constitutes a discovery." It is "the idea which attaches itself to the fact. Facts are neither great nor little in themselves. The grandeur is in the idea which marshals them. Those who make discoveries are those who present us with a new idea which puts old or petty facts in a striking light. And this comes not so much from an induction as from an instinctive fore-feeling of the order of nature. So far from the mind being a blank tablet, learning everything from experience, the fact is that experience is only fruitful when it is guided by something that goes before and beyond facts, which solicits them, which, impelled by the momentum of the innate idea, interrogates nature, compels it under its urgent catechizings to deliver up its secret, revealing as a reality of nature the law hitherto but dreamed of by the thinker."

Even in the scientific domain, then, comparatively little

can be known unless the external vision be supplemented by the inward sight, the sense-perception by the mental intuition. And in the religious world it is by the same means that we learn those spiritual phenomena,—personality, free-will, sense of duty,—and those grand ideas, right and wrong, infinity, perfection, and divinity, that are the ineradicable roots of faith and piety. Not only is there more than one road to the land of knowledge, but he who would reach its richest mines, its grandest spiritual truths, must take the road of spiritual discernment. Science has failed to find them, and declared them undiscoverable, simply because it has travelled on the wrong path and used the wrong instruments. To seek to learn the presence of the moral law by an electrometer, or to test for the existence of the soul with litmus paper, or to discover God by the spectroscope, is as fruitless a quest, and fruitless for the same reason, as to seek to taste a sound, or to verify the beauty of the Sistine Madonna by making a chemical analysis of the pigments used upon it. In such cases the failure to observe the objects searched for does not demonstrate their non-existence, but simply the application to the inquiry of wrong methods. Against the failure of the sense to discover anything, I put the success of the spirit. Not till the perfume of the rose is disproved by the inability of the eye to see it; not till spherical geometry is shown false by the undiscoverability in nature of a perfect circle or by the absence of any absolute verification of the theorems concerning it, may the negative testimony of outward observation avail aught against the positive testimony of the religious faculties.

But intuition and instinct, we shall be told, are full of illusions, and moreover have no safeguard such as verification affords to observation. There is no method by which we can test them, to distinguish the false from the true—if there be any true. And so far from having a divine origin, and testifying legitimately to eternal and universal truths, they are, in reality, like our prejudices and our tastes, products of human experience. Our intuitions are thus subject to the same con-

ditions as our experience, and give no absolute truth. The axioms of geometry, e.g. Professor Helmholtz has shown, though necessary truths to us, may be false in another sphere. Imagine beings living and moving on the surface of a sphere, able to perceive nothing but what is on its surface, insensible to all else. The axioms of Euclid would not here be valid. The axiom, for instance, that there is only one shortest line between two points would not now be the truth. For between two diametrically opposite points an infinite number of shortest lines, all of equal length, could be drawn. Similarly, other axioms and propositions of our geometry would no longer hold good.

Now, what shall we say to this? We will willingly admit that not unfrequently what are mere prejudices or ungrounded prepossessions, pass themselves off, or are mistaken, for genuine intuitions. We will admit that intuitions are not at the first mature or purified from other elements, and that it takes great carefulness to disentangle and discriminate them from the other things with which they are involved. They come into the world not as full-formed powers, but rather as the capacities and potentialities of mental life. Only gradually do these embryo faculties unfold, and while experience is not their cause, it is undoubtedly the occasion and condition of their development. Between their adult and their rudimentary phase there is as wide a difference as between the grown bird and the egg. That the manifestations of the human intuitions should vary or should sometimes, especially among savage tribes, be absent altogether, is, then, no evidence against their trustworthiness or reality. If they sometimes delude us, it is but the same thing that the senses do. Scarcely a week passes, even with persons of intelligence, in which there is not more or less illusion of the perceptive faculties.

But these observations of sense you say are verified by other observations of the same sense or other senses, or, if illusions, are corrected by their disagreement with such other observations. But what verification have intuitions? The same as

your preceptions, I answer : When you have verified one perception by another, what do you verify your verification by ? If it has no verification, how is it any better guarantee than the preceding perception ? If it has a verification, what is it — another perception ? something outside of itself, or in itself ? As long as verification is sought in further observations, in corroborations *not* self-evident, we must continue our search for some more valid verification. We can stop only when we come to some self-evident truth, which needs no external buttress. We always do rest, and can only rest, our perceptive verifications at last in some intuition. “Intuition has no verification ; and consequently no safeguard,” do you say ? It is its own verification and safeguard. Verification itself is preceded and conditioned upon it.

How, then, if we are cut off from perceptive corroboration, can we distinguish between a false and a true intuition ? By mental analysis. The guarantee of true intuitions is their simplicity, irreducibility, ultimateness, universality, above all, their necessity. The best criterion of a truth, as Herbert Spencer declares, is the inconceivability of its negation, and the mark of reality is “inexpugnable persistence in consciousness.” There are conditions under which the intuitions may not be applicable. In a world of two dimensions the axioms of geometry of three dimensions would not of course hold true. But this does not prove that the axioms and demonstrations of Euclid are false ; only that conditions may be conceived in which they would not apply. The axioms and demonstrations are true eternally, even though nowhere in nature should be found the conditions in which they could be applied and realized.

Here we are met by the objections of the Evolutionist school, that these intuitions are really but products of the experience of the race, — mental habits formed by association and consolidated by inheritance, and thus ingrained in the cerebral structure of each descendant, — so that on the application of the appropriate stimulus, the ideas of the man of to-day are given the same forms as they had in his ancestor.

As regards this I would remark, in the first place, that it is an explanation quite inconsistent with the main theory, the evolution hypothesis, of those who offer it. The law of evolution is the ascent from the lower to the higher, from the simple to the more complex, from the instinctive to the rational. But according to this theory the habits and powers which are now involuntary and unconscious were formerly more voluntary and conscious. The earlier faculties of animals, for example, were the higher, and their present state a degeneration. Why do we give to the instincts of the bee, the wasp, the beaver, a special place in our thoughts, rather than suppose them to be ordinary exercises of the conscious reason of the creature? Because the knowledge which the operations of instinct exhibit, the acquaintance with physical and physiological laws, and even with the mental qualities and dispositions of other animals which it displays, and the processes of reasoning by which advantage is taken of them, do not seem to us attributable to the conscious mind of the animal without absurd incongruity with the limited intelligence of the creature in other respects. But the absurdity is just as great or greater to attribute it to the conscious knowledge and reasoning of the same species in earlier generations. It is true enough that in man many actions become instinctive and mechanical as the result of a previous intellectual operation of the self-conscious or reasoning kind. But the idea that instinct in all other animals has the same origin, the Duke of Argyll rightly calls "a dream due to the exaggerated anthropomorphism of those very philosophers who are most apt to denounce this sort of error in others. . . . The theory of experience assumes the pre-existence of the very powers for which it professes to account. The very lowest of the faculties by which experience is acquired is imitation. But the desire to imitate must be as instinctive as the organs are hereditary by which imitation is effected." Then follow in their order all the higher faculties and ideas, such as those of space, time, law, purpose, cause, by which the lessons of experience are put together into an ordered whole. Every

step in this process supposes the pre-existence of powers and tendencies anterior to experience, instinctive and innate. As Herbert Spencer himself has truly said, "Those who contend that knowledge results wholly from the experiences of the individual, fall into an error as great as if they were to ascribe all bodily growth and structure to exercise, forgetting the innate tendency to assume the adult form." But to assign it all to the experience of the individual's ancestors equally neglects the main factor in the case, the innate tendencies not only of physical structure but of mental habit, that must have pre-existed before these creatures could have learned anything at all from experience.

So, too, he who explains our natural beliefs as mere unmeaning agglutinations from the lower elements of our experience, formed by the association of ideas, commits the error of overlooking the significant fact involved in those laws of association themselves. "For the very idea of association," as has been well pointed out, supposes a guiding impulse. How can we classify without a standard of classification? How can we connect without channels of connection? Laws of association are but the manifestation of pre-determined associating tendencies or principles in the mind. Did not these exist, a man would be no more capable of learning from experience than an oyster.

But let us grant for the moment the truth of the hereditary experience theory, and see what comes of it. Suppose we trace our instincts and intuitions back to the consolidated experience of our ancestors. Let us say that we think with the intelligence, not only of the individual, but of the whole race, from the earliest epoch of savage life down to the present. Then, if you wish, grant the further hypothesis of the evolutionist, that the man is the child of lower, ape-like forms, and these of still lower, and thus trace the race down to some simple ascidian or jelly-fish. Then resolve life into the happy combination of physical forces, and mind into the product of nervous action under the influence of the surrounding universe of matter. What then? If the mind is

but a part and product of the universe of matter, then the laws of mind are but the laws of matter released and transformed. They are the laws of mind on this higher stage of existence, because of old they were the laws of matter in the lower stage. Our fundamental forms of thought, our universal instincts and necessary intuitions point, then, to universal facts of nature which engendered them. Instead of being subjective merely, or possibly delusive, they must correspond to the objective facts of nature to which their existence is due. They bear sure witness to the existence in the cosmic environment about them, of all those great principles, forces, and truths to which they are the natural and necessary self-adjustments. We know things, that is, as they are; our knowledge of the universe, given in our universal instincts and necessary intuitions, though quite a limited knowledge, is true as far as it goes.

But if we may trust to those instincts and intuitions which testify to the existence of spiritual things sufficiently to accept such order of existence as a fact, can we know any more than the bare fact of such existence? Is not the whole nature of spiritual things, it is urged, shrouded in inscrutable mystery? The infinite, the divine, things in themselves, are not these beyond the possibility of knowledge to finite minds? Now it is true that the limits of our knowledge are very narrow, and also that within these narrow limits our knowledge is very imperfect. In truth, there is nothing that we know completely. Our bosom friend is a foreign kingdom to us. We have touched at most but at a port or two along the shores of his spiritual realm. There are multitudes of inlets hidden from us — vast provinces of his life and being which our most adventurous explorations have never reached. Even the most familiar object, the grass-blade, the drop of water, the simplest crystal, has something about it that is unknowable. To explain any one of these completely we must know the whole Cosmos. Especially is this so in the religious realm. For, as Strauss has truly said, “there is nothing profound without mystery.” Grandeur

and brighter than all other truths as spiritual truths are, their shadows naturally are equally unusual. We shall always remain ignorant of much, probably of even the greater part of what relates to the origin and history of the universe, the character, nature, and relations of God and the soul. Nevertheless, to maintain that the darkness here is total is just as much of an error as to maintain that all is light. Though we cannot know divine things with complete fulness, we may yet know them in part. Though human intellect cannot fathom to the bottom the depths of spirit, nor follow out to infinity the divine curve, yet it can drop the plummet of thought deep enough to know whether this sacred mystery can be any form of matter or blind force, or whether it must be thought to be something higher. It can trace out a section of the infinite hyperbola sufficient to show whether the curve run by chance or law, toward the irrational or the rational, the evil or the good, the impersonal or the personal.

The boundary of the knowable, in the first place, is not a rigid, immovable limit. It gives to the pick of the scientist, to the probe of the philosopher, to the clearer eye of the seer. One age leaves it at a different place from that where it found it. If the realm of the unknown is never to cease to surround that of the known, it is not because no incursions can be made into it, but because, however much it gives up, its infinity is inexhaustible. It is a path that, though knowable in front as well as behind, is yet so boundless that, though the discoverer go on and on, he will still find ever lengthening vistas of the unexplored to invite him further still.

In the second place, it should be noticed that he who pronounces God absolutely unknowable erects his own inability as a bound for all attainments, and, moreover, as Martineau has pointed out, implicitly attributes to that which he exalts as infinite and unlimited a very restricting limitation and incapacity, viz. the inability to make himself known. For, evidently if there is no possibility of God's being known by man, then on the side of God there must be an equal impos-

sibility of his making himself known. To assert this seems to me, so far from being the humble and modest attitude that it has been reckoned, to be rather a gross presumption. A genuine humble-mindedness would qualify even the confession of its own ignorance and inability with a doubt of that. He ought to speak of God rather as one of the Hindu Upanishads speaks of Brahma, "Whosoever knows this truth, I do not know that I do not know him, *he* knows him."

In one sense the inconceivable is incredible. That which contradicts our reason is certainly not to be believed; for it cannot be even thought. In one sense the infinite is inconceivable, — it is unpicturable, that is, by the imagination. It is unrealizable by the wildest fancy. When the world-conquering ape, in the Chinese fable, aspired to subdue heaven also, Brahma held out his hand, and bade him leap over it. Over eye-wearying plains, over range after range of snow-clad summits the ape flew in his mighty bound, and alighted on the loftiest mountain peak that he had ever beheld. But, lo! it was but one of Brahma's fingers. So, in our mightiest flights of intellect, we can pass over but a finger's breadth of the divine. Nevertheless, the inconceivable, in another sense, namely, that which overpasses our finite faculties not by contradiction, but by immensity, is certainly credible, is, indeed, absolutely necessary to thought. The idea of the infinite, though not to be pictured, is one clearly thinkable. This infinity of immensity, that which is more than any finite, is a quite positive idea. Its vastness in quantity may debar us from enclosing it in our thought, but it does not prevent our grasping enough of it to know its quality. It may not be entirely comprehended; but it is not unintelligible in its essential characteristics. Magnitude and nature are different things. Because one cannot be encompassed in thought, we are not therefore utterly ignorant of the other. I cannot comprehend in my thought this immense ocean of air in which we live, and by which we breathe. Nevertheless, I know its nature, its chemical constituents, its pressure, elasticity, fluidity, and other mechan-

ical properties, and I know that they are essentially the same in every part of the immense atmospheric sea that envelops the globe. Suppose the immensity of the air actually infinite instead of merely immensely beyond our comprehension, would its nature be any the less knowable? Take the infinite space that our reason compels us to believe in, and while our minds are unable, evidently, to realize its extent, yet can we think of it in any part, even at infinity, as anything else than space,—possessed of the same three dimensions, and capable of holding extended objects? Take a cylinder. Prolong it in thought to infinity. Though we cannot by utmost stretch of our imagination follow it there, yet we know that at infinity it would still keep all the characteristics of a cylinder, and none others. A section made at right-angles to the axis would always be a circle. Similarly with a trait or attribute of the divine; its enlargement to the infinite scale does not change it into something else. Infinite power we know is still power; infinite wisdom without doubt is still wisdom. Love in the divine is not something entirely unknowable, but the sweetest and fullest form of affection. Spiritual things are not exalted by immensity or indeterminateness, but by perfection of character. God's infinitude is not exclusive, separating him from his creation, but rather inclusive. Our knowledge is not so much erroneous as inadequate. We may trust it not only for what it tells, but for the direction in which it points us.

It seems to be thought that somehow that which we cannot or do not know must be necessarily antagonistic to what we do know, and puts it all in doubt. But that which must always remain unknown certainly cannot upset our present knowledge, can do nothing to us that should frighten us, or unsettle our minds. And that which, though not yet known, may hereafter be brought within the field of our knowledge must, through that very possibility of being known, have harmonious relations with our present knowledge. We can come to understand the unknown only as we can find in it some likeness to the already known. The new knowledge will

modify the old ; it may add to it ; but it will not be totally dissimilar or contradictory. This is the experience of all growth in knowledge hitherto, that the same order holds, new truths being unfolded from the old, not blankly opposing it. And we may rightly presume it for the remainder. "Doubt ought not to be thrown upon an intuition or a demonstration," as Lewes has justly said, "merely because it is an intuition or a demonstration of one item in the great whole itself. If we can resolve an equation of the first or second degree, this absolute certainty is not disturbed because there are equations of the sixth degree which surpass our powers. . . . The existence of an unknown quantity does not affect the accuracy of calculations founded on the known quantities of the element." Certainly, from the mere possibility, if there be such a possibility, of an upsetting of our present ideas (sometime or somehow ; no one pretends to say when or how) no sensible man should discard all the solidly grounded truths already attained. The logical vice involved in the argument of Spencer and the agnostic school in general is, in fact, the very one that *savants* and logicians have blamed theologians for falling into. The agnostic school, it will be found, always start with some, generally with a great many, assumptions as to the infinite and absolute, — what they are, and what they imply, — and from these they reason down toward the finite and the created, and because they find in this process of analysis, comparison, and logical development many inconsistencies and inconceivabilities they leap to the conclusion that the ultimate reality is in every respect unknowable, and that those attributes of power, wisdom, love, righteousness, with which humanity, as the result of its experience and intuition, has invested the divine are all delusive ; that, in short, we have no justification in assigning to the First Cause any attributes whatever. The agnostic thus turns his own inability to argue down correctly from the infinite into an accusation of the impossibility of the theist's arguing up from the finite towards the infinite. Mathematics, however, show that

arguments from the infinite to the finite are rarely, if ever, trustworthy, while arguments from the finite up to the infinite are often sound and valuable. Because the agnostic, by inverting the proper method of reasoning as regards the infinite, gets himself into trouble, how does it follow that no valid results can be attained by the theist when he employs the right method ?

In point of fact, however much men of science object to the use of the infinite, they themselves use it freely ; in many departments they cannot proceed without it. In geometry the conceptions of the line, circle, and sphere ; in mathematics the passage from the axioms of uniform motion to other forms of motion ; in algebra the calculus, the mightiest instrument of mathematical investigation, — all these require as indispensable the conception of the infinitely small, and reasoning upon it. Astronomy and geology, on the other hand, lead us to the correlative infinitude, the infinitely large. Especially do those who belong to the materialistic school, and scout most contemptuously the idea of any infinite when presented by theism, make without scruple the most confident assertions of the infinite in their own hypotheses. Strauss, Vogt, Büchner, Haeckel, each lays down, as fundamental principles of his system, the eternity of matter and the immortality of force. Even Herbert Spencer cannot get along without using the idea of the infinite. Though he has branded all ideas which involve infinite self-existence as pseudo-ideas, and consequently condemned all forms of theism, pantheism, and materialism as inevitably involving such illegitimate conceptions, no sooner has he laid theology, as he imagines, in ruins, and swept off the debris, and gone about his own system of building, than he puts in again the same old condemned corner-stone ; tells us that matter was uncreated and indestructible, and that force always persists in absolutely unchanged quantity, — ideas which necessarily involve infinite duration both in the past and the future. And, moreover, the principle of thought by which science extends its reasonings beyond the finite is just the same as that by which re-

ligion claims to know the character of the divine, viz. that what is true up to a limit is true at the limit.

But is not our knowledge confined to the relative? it will still be urged. Can we know God in himself? Can we think of the Absolute without determining and conditioning him? Can we think of the Divine except in the colors of the thinking self? Doubtless we cannot. But this, again, is a condition of all our knowledge. We can know no one in himself, out of his relations to us. We know a friend only by the various manifestations of his personality, his looks, tones, actions. And these must come into some connection with ourself. We cannot know a grain of corn in its inmost nature, irrespective of its appearance to us. We know it only by the phenomena that it manifests, its shape, hardness, color, taste. Moreover, these manifestations must be manifestations to our special senses, our individual mind. What they are or may be independent of our sensibility we can never know. Whatever perception we have, the perceiving subject is mingled with it, and a factor in the product, and that perception is such only as the nature of our faculties allows it to be. Without eyes we can know no color, without ears, no sound, and the range of colors, the gamut of sounds, is such only as the structure of those organs allows.

Now all this is true enough, and instead of this mystery of the Absolute and this veil of the relative being death-sentences of faith, they are as innocent as any principle of knowledge that can be found. All that this famous difficulty amounts to saying is, that if we take away all that we can know of any object we cannot know what is left; and this self-evident law of all things applies also to God, that we cannot know him more fully or know him by any different way than we know all other things.

This, I say, is true enough. But about it has gathered a huge penumbra of notions that are not true, that do not follow. It does not follow, as is inferred, that because our knowledge is relative to us it is therefore deceiving. Why

may not the relative be real and true? Is there anything that necessarily confines genuineness, actuality, or substantiality to that which does not come into relation with us? Why is all this to be attributed to that mental air-castle — the thing in itself, or to the relations of things to other minds rather than to their relations to our minds? What reason have we for assuming reality to be that which cannot appear, or which appears to other minds or in other relations than to us? "If reality is inscrutable, then," as Lewes asks, "by what right can we affirm it different from the manifested things"? I maintain that all things are known by their relations for the simple reason that all things exist only in relations. I maintain that the relative, the phenomena that appear to us, are not mere phantasms, but parts of the great real. A man stubs his toe against the curb-stone. The sensation within him is a real thing, the stone is a real thing. Doubtless it is something more than what he feels it to be; but it is at least this in this relation. It may be thought of without reference to its present conditions, but it is just now, in reference to those conditions, precisely what he feels it to be. Remove it, and the whole equilibrium of the Cosmos would feel the change.

And moreover the realities, so far from being made unknowable to us by our relations to them, are revealed through those relations. To infer that we can know only the relations, never the things; that we can become acquainted only with appearances, never with substances; and that we have no reason to believe in the existence, or to believe anything about the nature of things and substances, is another fallacy. Relations have no existence unless there are things to be related; and if the things are entirely unknown their relations must be also unknown. Appearances are impossible unless there is something to appear. And through the relations themselves comes a knowledge of the things related. In the very appearances we learn of the substances appearing. My desk, for example, manifests itself to my touch as hard and smooth, to my eye as of a certain shape and color, to the

ear, if it be vigorously struck, as possessed of a certain resonance. These phenomena and relations to my sensitive self, speak of something which has power to impress me with these sensations; they speak of something that abides, that I cannot banish by thinking it away—something that when I shut my eyes to it or go away from it, waits for my return in the very same group of appearances till I return. These qualities speak of some unity in which they centre, some reality to which they belong, and whose nature, as it is in reference to me, is shown by them. Herbert Spencer, arguing for our knowledge of matter, maintains that though we know only the relative reality, yet that that stands in such a fixed relation to the absolute reality that knowledge of one is tantamount to knowledge of the other. "The conditioned effect standing in indissoluble relation with the unconditioned cause and equally persistent with it, so long as the conditions persist, is to the consciousness supplying those conditions equally real, and for practical purposes is the same as the cause itself." This is true, and true for all phenomena, for all realities. And in accordance with this principle, I claim that so far from the ultimate reality, the divine, being inscrutable, we have no mean knowledge of it. We have knowledge not only of its existence, but of its nature. We know it as we know matter, force, as we know a magnet, a rose, a bird—by its action upon us, by its manifestations to our faculties, "by the persistent impressions which are the persistent results of a persistent cause." God is in the manifestations of himself which he presents in his created things, as well as in that mysterious essence behind the manifestations. God is in the known as well as in the unknown.

If the ultimate reality be utterly unknowable, as Mr. Spencer says, then any manifestation of it would be impossible, or would be meaningless. The absolute reality would be a blank to all intelligence. To make any predicate of it whatsoever would be illegitimate. Yet Mr. Spencer himself assigns attributes to the unknowable. He speaks of it as *eternal*, *omnipresent*, as *active*, as a *power*, and as a *cause*.

Professor Tyndall,¹ calls God, "the power that makes for righteousness, intellectual as well as ethical." Here certainly is a good deal asserted about the character as well as about the existence of the Absolute Reality, and in terms, moreover, derived from conscious experience. By what reasoning process have these terms been attributed to the supreme existence? Nay, by what reasoning process has its existence been known or affirmed? "By our mental obligation," to answer in words that Mr. Spencer himself has employed, "to regard every phenomenon as a manifestation of some power." By that constitution of our minds by which thought cannot be prevented from passing behind appearance, and trying to conceive a cause behind. But surely if this reasoning process is good to show us so much of the divine, it is good to show us much more. Every phenomenon of the universe is a real and true manifestation of the action and character of its Supreme Cause. As the nature of oxygen, though tasteless to the tongue, odorless to the nose, invisible to the eye, not to be grasped by the hand, is yet known to us by the effects which it is still capable of, both mechanically and chemically, so can we know the God who is himself unobservable by any sense, through his constant actions and effects in the world.

By studying these phenomena of the creation, then, we may learn the character of the Creator. The Cosmos reveals that order which gives it its name. Steady laws in regular movement, in harmonious co-ordination carry on its manifold operations. Condensing nebula, whirling cyclone, swinging tides, all have their place and their rule. The power from which this order is the outcome, we may then know as orderly.

Again, the Cosmos manifests itself as a unity. To the first glance the world, indeed, seems a hurly-burly of contending powers, a conglomerate of a thousand different substances, laws, and existences. But as science, with its closer scrutiny examines it, the apparent discords melt away. The

¹ Popular Science Monthly, Feb. 1875, p. 424.

complex resolve themselves into combinations of the simple. The antagonisms reveal themselves as but efforts at stable equilibrium and coherences. Through the whole gamut of matter — yes, and of life, with all its numberless forms and grades — is discovered the harmonic note. Energies and laws converge to one focus. Forces correlate and transform themselves one into the other, till under the outward diversity we can recognize but a single ultimate power. All manifestations of the supreme, thus resolving themselves into unity, can we not feel sure that the supreme cause, however many modes of manifestation it may have, is itself one?

Again, let us survey the history of the world, the succession of living organisms, the path of human events. Is there not in these appearances, another attribute of the Ever-appearing clearly shown — the attribute of life? Nothing remains inert, but all is full of movement. Nothing remains stagnant, but is ever pushing forward, climbing up, unfolding. If sometimes there seems retrogression, it is but the backward curve of the spiral, to mount and enlarge still more. Species rise above species in an ascending hierarchy. The new age stands above every old. The process of the years brings with it widening to every power, more and more perfection to every form. Has this spontaneous activity and continual process of adjustment toward higher and higher levels, this unfolding evolution, or in plain terms, growth, (the grand discovery of modern science) nothing to tell us of the nature of the power that is behind it? Does it not, in fact, indicate at the heart of this self-moving universe, that which alone can move itself, can grow, a *life*, the vital energy of the first cause?

Moreover, this order and progress in the universe, if we fully understand it, is arranged according to intellectual conceptions, exhibits systematic plans and purposes. Means combine to promote ends. The thoughts of the mathematicians are reproduced in the laws of plant and planet. All parts and processes move towards the fulfilment of one grand design, a greater and greater perfection. The developing pro-

cess, as it runs up from the insensate to the sensitive, from the instinctive to the rational, causes more and more intelligence to shine forth in the world. If mind in unconscious nature be denied, no one can deny its manifestation in the conscious parts of nature, animal and human mind. And this manifested intelligence permeating the world, this mind blossoming forth from the central life, must bespeak (on the lowest physical view of its origin) that central life as also intelligent.

Again, in the harmonious lines and forms of nature, blushing blossom and majestic mountain-mass, glowing sunbeam and checkered leaf-shade, we see a beauty that supplies an exquisite gratification. In the fruit and grain prepared in summer for our winter food, in the treasures of metal and fuel and precious stones built and stored for us in the bowels of the earth, in the million provisions for the comfort and happiness of every creature, in all these admirable adaptations that disclose themselves most exquisitely to those who examine most carefully, there is shown the grand sweep of the universe toward the good, the beneficent. Even in the bitter we find the sweet hidden; through struggle and sorrow we are led to higher success. By bane and by bruise we are conducted to the abiding blessedness. Can we behold all these tokens of blessedness and love, and rationally say that they tell us of no benevolence, that they suggest no love in that Being which thus goeth forth in space and time?

Once more, survey those visible things that manifest the invisible, the moral, and spiritual elements of the world, the instincts of the right, the authority of moral law. Observe the invincible tide that sweeps toward justice, the remorse that chastises the guilty, the serene peace that rewards the pure-hearted. Consider the aspirations of the holy, the grand visions of the seer, the saint's consciousness of divine communion. The mother counts her own life nothing if she may save her babe. The patriot makes way for liberty over his spear-pierced body. The martyr goes unwaveringly to the stake rather than be disloyal to truth. These grand

illustrations of the nobleness of humanity which age to age renews, their elements lying latent in every soul, are not they facts of the cosmic evolution? Are not they manifestations of the ultimate reality as truly as any other phenomena? Are they not as rightly significant of its nature? Yes. As the picture shows the artist's sense of beauty, the symphony the composer's musical taste and capacity, the judge's administration of justice his discernment of right and faithfulness to it, and as the father's self-sacrifice reveals his paternal love, so through the rectitude, justice, love, faithfulness, and holiness manifested in mankind's noblest representatives do we know in the Creator of man a rectitude, justice, love, and holiness bright enough to give the moral images, which, even but dimly reflected on the mirror of human nature, so glorify it. Not that these qualities in us adequately represent the attributes of the Divine, but rather that on their lower level they correspond to them, they shadow forth something of the brighter reality. That in the Supreme there must be an intelligence at least as wise as our highest wisdom, a goodness at least as much and as good as our best, a real equal to our highest ideal and our loftiest aspiration — this is the necessary inference from the manifestation of those qualities in us.

Here, then, by those very methods of observation, generalization, and inductive inference by which physical science is built up we can know something, not merely of the existence, but of the nature and attributes of the Ultimate Reality, manifested in the universe. But if science may not admit this sketch of the divine character as affording any absolute or complete knowledge of it, it must at least logically admit it as sufficient relative knowledge, good as far as it goes, good as its own knowledge of the force and matter and motion that it talks so confidently of, good as these are for "good working hypotheses"; nay, as the only hypotheses that will work.

But all this, it may be said, still falls short of giving us the attributes and the measure of the truly Divine. It gives

us a being indefinitely immense, but not infinite; inconceivably enduring, but not eternal; wonderfully wise, but not omniscient; pure as our purest ideal, but not absolutely perfect; vastly superhuman, but not supernatural; grand and majestic, indeed, but still limited, finite. For, discerning it only by its manifestations in the universe, we have no right to attribute to it anything beyond the measure experienced in that universe, and nowhere in the actual universe can we discern that which is absolutely unlimited, absolutely exempt from liability to imperfection. What warrant, then, have we for that infinitude, eternity, omniscience, and perfection that constitute the really divine attributes of God? Yes, I admit that the physical universe manifests nowhere these highest attributes of the Divine. The knowledge of them is not to be drawn from the contemplation of nature. These are given, not by observation or logical inference, but by intuition and spiritual suggestion, the more direct vision of the soul that sees beyond the boundary of actual or possible experience into the realm of pure truth. It is the straighter entrance into the mind, and the clear recognition by consciousness of that revealing light which God imparts to humanity. The warrant of the validity of these intuitions is the same that warrants the lower intuitions on which science is based, viz. their irrepressible existence, "their persistency in consciousness"; "the inexplicability of their arising or continuing in our belief, unless corresponding to realities" (to use Spence's criterion); "the complete satisfaction which is thus given to the needs of the intellect" (to use Tyndall's test). If our ultimate and necessary belief in the persistence of force, the indestructibility of matter, and the uniformity of nature be good proof of these basic laws of science (and remember they are the only proof there is of them); if the inexpugnable consciousness of the existence of an ultimate reality behind appearance establish that grand truth, as Herbert Spencer tells us it does, and founds his whole system of evolution on it; if the fulfilment of the desire of the reason which the luminiferous ether gives

should be accepted as good evidence for its reality, as Professor Tyndall tells the world it should; why is not the same kind of proof valid evidence for these spiritual truths, these higher attributes of the divine nature? Certainly, no one who accepts the current theories or the established principles of science can rightly object to the reasoning.

ARTICLE III.

DOES THE NEW TESTAMENT WARRANT THE HOPE OF A PROBATION BEYOND THE GRAVE?

BY PROF. E. D. C. ROBBINS, NEWTON HIGHLANDS.

Preliminary Remarks.

THE present discussion is intended to be exegetical mainly. Still, as preliminary to a right understanding of particular passages of Scripture, and to clear away some objections which arise in some minds in reference to what God ought to have done if he intended the punishment of sin to be endless, a few suggestions cannot be amiss. No argument, perhaps, is so much dwelt upon by the advocates of universal salvation or restoration as the fact that future endless punishment was not clearly and specifically revealed before, near to, or after the advent of the Messiah. A leading authority¹ for this doctrine asks, "Is it probable after an utter silence

¹ Rev. A. A. Miner, D.D., in a Sermon preached in Columbus Avenue Church, April 7, 1878. The special topic of the Sermon as reported was: "If the Doctrine of Endless Punishment is moral in its influence, why did God reject it as a motive to obedience for at least four thousand years?" In Thayer's Theology of Universalism too, we find this impassioned appeal to the reader: "If the doctrine of endless punishment be true, then for four thousand years God made no revelation of it. From Moses to Malachi the Scriptures are entirely [?] silent on the subject. What shall we say of that justice which could see the millions of earth through all this time, in utter ignorance of their future, plunging into the gulf of endless torment and despair, without one word of warning? Think of this for a moment, that God should suffer the world to go on for forty centuries with not the slightest hint of danger to those who were daily and hourly sinking into the flaming abyss! Is it possible to believe such monstrous blasphemy against the God who is love?"