

"The hypothesis of self-creation," the English philosopher continues, "which practically amounts to what is called Pantheism, is similarly incapable of being represented in thought. Really to conceive self-creation, is to conceive potential existence passing into actual existence by some inherent necessity; which we cannot do. And even were it true that potential existence is conceivable, we should still be no forwarder. For whence the potential existence? This would just as much require accounting for existence, and just the same difficulties would meet us." According to Spencer, therefore, both the pantheistic and the atheistic hypotheses must be dismissed, as utterly inadequate to explain the fact of the world's actual existence.

The third hypothesis, and the one generally received, is known as the theistic hypothesis; creation by an external agency. But "the idea," I am still quoting Spencer, "of a Great Artificer shaping the universe, somewhat after the manner in which a workman shapes a piece of furniture, does not help us to comprehend the real mystery; viz., the origin of the materials of which the universe consists. . . . But even supposing that the genesis of the universe could really be represented in thought as the result of an external agency, the mystery would be as great as ever, for there would still arise the question: How came there to be an external agent, for we have seen that self-existence is rigorously inconceivable? Thus, impossible as it is to think of the actual universe as self-existing, we do but multiply impossibilities of thought

by every attempt we make to explain its existence."¹

According to Spencer, then, the theistic hypothesis of creation is as unthinkable as the hypotheses of Atheism and Pantheism. The theistic, as well as the atheistic and the pantheistic views, he will have it, imply a contradiction in terms, and, such being the case, we must, perforce, resign ourselves to the acceptance of the agnostic position, which is one of ignorance and darkness.

Spencer's Unknowable.

But, strive as he may, Spencer cannot think of the world around him without thinking of it as caused—and hence he is forced to think of a First Cause, infinite, absolute and unconditioned. And in spite of his assertion that God is and must be unknowable, he is continually contradicting himself by assigning characteristics and attributes to that of which he avers we can know absolutely nothing. For He of whom nothing can be known, of whom nothing can be declared, is, Spencer affirms, the First Cause of all, the Ultimate Reality, the Inscrutable Power, that which underlies all phenomena, that which accounts for all phenomena, that which transcends all phenomena, the Supreme Being, the Infinite, the Absolute, the All-Being, the Creative Power, the Infinite and Eternal Energy, by which all things are created and sustained; a mode of being as much transcending intelligence and will as these transcend mechanical motion.

¹"First Principles," chap. II.

Max Müller on Agnosticism.

The distinguished philologist and orientalist, Max Müller, although not a philosopher by profession, reasons far more philosophically than Herbert Spencer, when he writes: "I cannot help discovering, in the universe an all-pervading causality or reason for everything; for even when, in my phenomenal ignorance, I do not yet know a reason for this or that, I am forced to admit that there exists some such reason; I feel bound to admit it, because, to a mind like ours, nothing can exist without a sufficient reason. But how do I know that? Here is the point where I cease to be an agnostic. I do not know it from experience, and yet I know it with a certainty greater than any which experience can give. This, also, is not a new discovery. The first step towards it was made at a very early time by the Greek philosophers, when they turned from the observation of outward nature to higher spheres of thought, and recognized in nature the working of a mind, or *Nous*, which pervades the universe. Anaxagoras, who was the first to postulate such a *Nous* in nature, ascribed to it not much more than the first impulse to the inter-action of his homoiomeries. But even his *Nous* was soon perceived to be more than a mere *Primum Mobile*; more than the *κινῶν ἀκίνητον*. We, ourselves, after thousands of years of physical and metaphysical research, can say no more than that there is *nous*, that there is mind and reason in nature. *Sa Majesté le Hasard* has long been dethroned in all scientific studies, and

neither natural selection, nor struggle for life, nor the influence of environment, nor other aliases of it, will account for the *logos* within us. If any philosopher can persuade himself, that the true and well-ordered *genera* of nature are the results of mechanical causes, whatever name we may give them, he moves in a world altogether different from my own. To Plato, these *genera* were ideas; to the peripatetics, they were words, or *logoi*; to both, they were manifestations of thought."¹

• Sources of Agnosticism.

One of the chief sources of the Agnosticism now so rampant, is to be sought in the lamentable ignorance of the fundamental principles of true philosophy and theology everywhere manifest, and especially in the productions of our modern scientists and philosophers. And the only antidote for agnostic, as well as atheistic teaching, is that scholastic philosophy which contemporary thinkers ignore, if they do not positively condemn; for it alone can clear up the fallacies which are constantly admitted in the name of philosophy, and which have done so much to confuse thought and to make sound ratiocination impossible.

Another not unfrequent cause of error arises from a false psychology, from confounding or identifying a faculty—imagination—which is material, with a faculty—reason—which is immaterial. Mind is made a function of matter, and that which cannot be pictured to the imagination is regarded as impossible of

¹ *The Nineteenth Century*, December, 1894.

apprehension by the intellect. That, therefore, which the imagination cannot admit, cannot be accepted by reason; that which is unimaginable is, *ipso facto*, unthinkable. Such is the suicidal skepticism of those who confuse the immaterial thought, which is above and beyond sense, with the material imagination, which is always intimately connected with sense, and which, by its very nature, is incompetent to rise above the conditions and limitations of matter.

Again, probably no two terms are more prolific of fallacy and confusion than the much-abused words time and space.

Infinite Time.

One of the gravest objections against the existence of God, from Spencer's point of view, is that we cannot conceive of a self-existent being, because self-existence implies infinite past time, which is a contradiction in terms. We cannot conceive of God existing from all eternity, because eternity is but time multiplied to infinity, and we cannot conceive time multiplied to infinity.

The difficulty here indicated arises from a misapprehension of the nature of time, and from an anthropomorphic view of God, which subjects Him to the conditions and limitations of His creatures. God has not existed through infinite time, as is supposed. He does not exist in time at all. He exists apart from time; and before time was, God was. Time implies change and succession; but in God there is neither change nor succession. As the measure of the existence of created things, it is something relative;

but in God all is absolute. Eternity is not, as the agnostic has it, time raised to an infinite power, no more than the attributes of God are human attributes raised to an infinite power. God has existed from all eternity, but He is, by His very nature, above time, and before time, and beyond time, even infinite time. To make God exist through infinite past time, because He has existed from all eternity, would be tantamount to imposing on Him the conditions of created things, and to degrading Him as much as do the most extravagant of anthropomorphists.

Infinite Space.

And as God does not exist in time, so He does not exist in space. Infinite space, like infinite time, is a contradiction in terms. If there were nothing to be measured, if material objects could be annihilated, space would disappear. For space is not an independent entity, as agnostics suppose, not a kind of a huge box, which was created for the reception of material things, but the necessary and concomitant result of the creation of matter, of what is limited and capable of measurement. And as God is above and before and beyond time, so is He likewise above and before and beyond space. As time began only when God uttered His creative *fiat*, so space had no existence until the creation of the material universe. Neither space nor time, therefore, can be used as a foundation on which to base an argument against creation, or the existence of a First Cause, for both space and time imply limitation, and God, the Absolute, is above and in-

dependent of all limitation. Agnostics, who protest so strongly against Anthropomorphism, are, therefore, themselves anthropomorphists, when they attempt, as they do by their irrational theory, to tie down the Creator to the conditions of His creatures.

Mysteries of Nature.

I have said that one of the chief causes of Agnosticism is ignorance of Christian philosophy and theology. This is true. But there is also another reason. The mysteries of nature which everywhere confront us, and which baffle all attempts at their solution; the impossibility of lifting the veil which separates the visible from the invisible world, are other sources of skepticism, and contribute not a little to make Agnosticism plausible, and to give it the vogue which it now enjoys. "Hardly," says the Wise Man, "do we guess aright at things that are upon earth; and with labor do we find the things that are before us. But the things that are in Heaven, who shall search out?" The mysteries of the natural order, those which confront us on the threshold of the unseen, are great and often insoluble; but how much greater, how much more unfathomable, are those that envelop the world beyond the realm of sense, the world of spirit and soul, the world of angelic and Divine intelligence!

The difficulties indicated are grave indeed, but skeptics are not the only ones who have given them thought or fully appreciated their magnitude. There is a Christian as well as a skeptical Agnosticism, and all the difficulties suggested by the mysteries of the

natural and supernatural orders, were long ago realized and taken into account by Christian philosophy and Christian theology. They were before the minds of Origen and Clement of Alexandria; they occupied the brilliant intellects of St. Basil, St. John Chrysostom, St. Gregory of Nyssa and St. Augustine; they entered into the disputations of the Schoolmen, and have found a prominent place in the writings of their successors up to the present day. No, these difficulties have not been ignored; neither have they been underrated nor dismissed without receiving the consideration their importance demands. Far from being new, as certain writers would have us believe; far from being the product of the research of these latter days; far from being the result of those deep and critical investigations which have been conducted in every department of knowledge, sacred and profane, they are as old as the Church, as old even as speculative thought.

Christian Agnosticism.

Unlike the Agnosticism of skepticism, however, Christian Agnosticism is on firm ground, and, guided by the principles of a sound philosophy, is able with unerring judgment to discriminate the true from the false, and to draw the line of demarcation between the knowable and the unknowable. Christian Agnosticism confesses aloud that God is incomprehensible, that we can have no adequate idea of His perfections, but, unlike skeptical Agnosticism, it brushes aside the false and delusive hope, that in the distant future, when our faculties are

more highly developed, when the work of Evolution is farther advanced than it now is, we may perhaps be able to comprehend the Divine nature, and have an adequate notion of the Divine perfections. Christian Agnosticism tells us that not even the blessed in Heaven, who see the whole of the Divine nature, can ever have, even after millions and billions of ages, a knowledge which shall be commensurate in depth with the Divine Object of their adoration and love. They shall see God in the clear light of the Beatific Vision, *facie ad faciem*, and shall know as they are known. Nothing shall be hidden from them. Their intelligence will be illumined by the light of God's glory. The veil that now intervenes between the Creator and the creature will be removed, and the created intellect will be in the veritable presence of the Divine Essence. But even then, it will be impossible to have an adequate or a comprehensive knowledge of God. He will, as the Scholastics phrase it, be known *totus sed non totaliter*. The soul will always have new beauties undiscovered, fresh glories to arrest its enraptured gaze, and unfathomable abysses of love and wisdom to contemplate, whose immensity will be as great after millions of æons shall have elapsed, as when it was ushered into the Divine Presence, when it caught the first glimpse of the glory of the Beatific Vision, and experienced the first thrills of ecstasy in the contemplation of the fathomless, limitless ocean of God's infinite perfections. The soul will know God, but its knowledge will always be limited by the fact that it is created, that it is finite, that it is

human, that its capacity is narrowed and restricted by its very nature, and is, therefore, incompetent to fathom the depths, or comprehend the immensity, of the ocean of Divine Wisdom and Divine Love, to comprehend, in a word, that which is immeasurable, and infinite, and eternal.

If, then, the blessed may drink for all eternity at the fountain of the Godhead, without exhausting or diminishing the infinitude of joy and love and knowledge which is there found, we should not be surprised to encounter difficulties and mysteries, in the natural as well as in the supernatural order, which are above and beyond our weak and circumscribed intellects. We admit, and admit frankly, that there is much that we do not know, much that we can never comprehend. But our ignorance of many things does not make us skeptics in all things beyond the range of sense and experiment. We may not know God adequately, but we do know much about Him, aside from what He has been pleased to reveal regarding Himself. With St. Paul, we believe that "the invisible things of God from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made: His eternal power also and divinity."¹

¹Romans, chap. i, 20. I take pleasure in again quoting from Max Müller, who, in speaking of the matter under discussion truthfully observes: "In one sense I hope I am, and have always been, an agnostic, that is, in relying on nothing but historical facts, and in following reason as far as it will take us in matters of the intellect, and in never pretending that conclusions are certain which are not demonstrated or demonstrable. This attitude of the mind is the *conditio sine qua non* of all philosophy. If in future it is to be called Agnosticism, then I am a true agnostic; but if Agnosticism excludes a recognition of an

Of the essence of God we can know nothing. Even of matter we are ignorant as to its essence. From the existence of the world, we infer the existence of God; for our primary intuitions teach us that there can be no effect without a cause. The evidences of order and design in the universe, prove the existence of a Creator who is intelligent, who has power and will, and who, therefore, is personal, and not the blind fate and impersonal energy and unknowable entity of the agnostic.

Gods of the Positivist and the Agnostic.

The gods of the heathen were manifold and grotesque, but what shall we say of the objects which the positivist and agnostic propose for our worship and love?

The Greeks and Romans gave Divine honors to demi-gods and heroes. Comte, one of the apostles of modern Agnosticism, affects to recoil before such gross idolatry; but is he more of a philosopher, or less of an idolator, when he proclaims that it is not man taken individually, or any particular man, but man taken collectively, man considered in the aggregate, that is to be regarded as the object of our cult? The Roman and the Athenian worshipped Apollo and Hercules, Jupiter and Venus; Comte

eternal reason, pervading the natural and the moral world, if to postulate a rational cause for a rational universe is called Gnosticism, then I am a gnostic, and a humble follower of the greatest thinkers of our race, from Plato and the author of the Fourth Gospel to Kant and Hegel." *The Nineteenth Century*, Dec., 1894; see also, "The Christian Agnostic and the Christian Gnostic," by the Very Rev. A. F. Hewit, D. D., C. S. P., in the *American Catholic Quarterly Review*, January, 1891.

says we must worship humanity in its entirety. Huxley, however, dissents from this view, and tells us that it is not humanity, but the cosmos, the visible material universe, which should constitute the object of our highest veneration and religious emotion. Herbert Spencer is even more nebulous and mystical. His deity is an unknowable energy, "impersonal, unconscious, unthinking and unthinkable." God is "the great enigma which he [man] knows cannot be solved," and religion can at best be concerned only with "a consciousness of a mystery which can never be fathomed." According to Mr. Harrison, however—the brilliant critic of the views propounded by Huxley, the doughty combatant who has so frequently run full atilt against the champions of Agnosticism—Spencer's Unknowable is "an ever-present conundrum to be everlastingly given up;" his Something, or All-Being, is a pure negation, "an All-Nothingness, an *x*ⁿ and an Everlasting No." Verily it is of such, "vain in their thoughts and darkened in their foolish heart," that the Apostle of the Gentiles speaks when he declares that they "changed the truth of God into a lie; and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator."¹

But it is not my purpose to dilate on the teachings of Agnosticism. My sole object is to indicate briefly some of its more patent and fundamental errors. A detailed examination and refutation of them does not come within the purview of our subject. For such examination and refutation, the

¹"Romans," chap. i, 25.

reader is referred to works which treat of these topics *ex professo*.¹ It suffices for our present purpose to know the relation of Agnosticism to Evolution; to know that a particular phase of Evolution is so intimately connected with Agnosticism, that it cannot be disassociated from it, to realize that Agnosticism, and agnostic Evolution, are practically as synonymous as are Atheistic Evolution and Monism. It is enough for us to appreciate the fact that Agnosticism and Monism are fundamentally erroneous, to understand that both monistic and agnostic Evolution are untenable and inconsistent with the teaching of Theism and with the doctrines of Christianity; that they are illegitimate inductions from the known data of veritable science, and utterly at variance with the primary concepts of genuine philosophy. We need, consequently, consider them no further. Evolution, in the sense in which it is held by the Monist and Agnostic, is so obviously in positive contradiction to the leading tenets of Theism, that it may forthwith be dismissed as not only untenable, but as unwarranted by fact and experiment, and negatived by the incontestable principles of sound metaphysics and Catholic Dogma.

¹ See especially: "Agnosticism and Religion," by the Rev. George J. Lucas, D.D.; chaps. III and IV of "The Great Enigma," by W. S. Lilly, and the succinct and philosophical "Agnosticism," by the Right Rev. J. L. Spalding, D.D. The reader will likewise find many valuable and suggestive pages in Balfour's "Foundations of Belief," and in a review of this work by Mgr. Mercier, in the *Revue Neo-Scholastique*, for October, 1895.

CHAPTER IV.

THEISM AND EVOLUTION.

Evolution and Faith.

HAVING eliminated from our discussion the forms of Evolution held by the divers schools of monists and agnostics, there now remains but the third form, known as theistic Evolution. Can we, then, consistently with the certain deductions of science and philosophy, and in accordance with the positive dogmas of faith—can we as Christians, as Catholics, who accept without reserve all the teachings of the Church, give our assent to theistic Evolution? This is a question of paramount importance, one which is daily growing in interest, and one for an answer to which the reading public has long been clamoring. And with it must also be answered a certain number of cognate questions, of scarcely less interest and importance than the main question of Evolution itself.

I have elsewhere¹ shown that the principles of theistic Evolution—the Evolution, namely, which admits the existence of a God, and the development, under the action of His Providence, of the universe and all it contains—were accepted and defended by some of the most eminent Doctors of the early Greek and Latin Churches. It was a brilliant

¹"Bible, Science and Faith," part I, chaps. III and IV.