

These and other difficulties, some of which are often discussed but never disposed of, must force men hereafter to drop the higher anthropomorphic characters given to the First Cause, as they have long since dropped the lower. The conception which has been enlarging from the beginning must go on enlarging, until, by disappearance of its limits, it becomes a consciousness which transcends the forms of distinct thought, though it for ever remains a consciousness.

"But how can such a final consciousness of the Unknowable, thus tacitly alleged to be true, be reached by successive modifications of a conception which was utterly untrue? The ghost-theory of the savage is baseless. The material double of a dead man in which he believes, never had any existence. And if by gradual de-materialisation of this double was produced the conception of the supernatural agent in general—if the conception of a deity, formed by the dropping of some human attributes and transfiguration of others, resulted from continuance of this process; is not the developed and purified conception reached by pushing the process to its limit, a fiction also? Surely if the primitive belief was absolutely false, all derived beliefs must be absolutely false."

This objection looks fatal; and it would be fatal were its premiss valid. Unexpected as it will be to most readers, the answer here to be made is that at the outset a germ of truth was contained in the primitive conception—the truth, namely, that the power which manifests itself in consciousness is but a differently-conditioned form of the power which manifests itself beyond consciousness.

Every voluntary act yields to the primitive man, proof of a source of energy within him. Not that he thinks about his internal experiences; but in these experiences this notion lies latent. When producing motion in his limbs, and through them motion in other things, he is aware of the accompanying feeling of effort. And this sense of effort which is the antecedent of changes directly produced by him, becomes the conceived antecedent of changes not produced by him—furnishes him with a term of thought by which to represent the genesis of these objective changes. At first this idea of muscular force as antecedent unusual events around him, carries with it the whole assemblage of associated ideas. He thinks of the implied effort as an effort exercised by a being wholly like himself. In course of time these doubles of the dead, supposed to be workers of all but the most familiar changes, are modified in conception. Besides becoming less grossly material, some of them are developed into larger personalities presiding over classes of phenomena which being comparatively regular in their order, foster the idea of beings who, while far more powerful than men, are less variable in their modes of action. So that the idea of force as exercised by such beings, comes to be less associated with the idea of a human ghost. Further advances, by which minor supernatural agents become merged into one general agent, and by which the personality of this general agent is rendered vague while becoming widely extended, tend still further to dissociate the notion of objective force from the force known as such in consciousness; and the dissociation reaches its extreme in the thoughts of the man of science, who interprets in terms of force not only the visible changes of sensible bodies, but all physical changes whatever, even up to the undulations of the ethereal medium. Nevertheless, this force (be it force under that statical form by which matter resists, or under that dynamical form distinguished as energy) is to the last thought of in terms of that internal energy which he is conscious of as muscular effort. He is compelled to symbolise objective force in terms of subjective force from lack of any other symbol.

See now the implications. That internal energy which in the experiences of the primitive man was always the immediate antecedent of changes wrought by him—that energy which, when interpreting external changes, he thought of along with those attributes of a human personality connected with it in himself; is the same energy which, freed from anthropomorphic accompaniments is now figured as the cause of all external phenomena. The last stage reached is recognition of the truth that force as it exists beyond consciousness cannot be like what we know as force within consciousness; and that yet, as either is capable of generating the other, they must be different modes of the same. Consequently, the final outcome of that speculation commenced by the primitive man, is that the Power manifested throughout the Universe, distinguished as material, is the same power which in ourselves wells up under the form of consciousness.

It is untrue, then, that the foregoing argument proposes to evolve a true belief from a belief which was wholly false. Contrariwise, the ultimate form of the religious consciousness is the final development of a consciousness which at the outset contained a germ of truth obscured by multitudinous errors.

Those who think that science is dissipating religious beliefs and sentiments seem unaware that whatever of mystery is taken from the old interpretation is added to the new. Or rather, we may say that transference from the one to the other is accompanied by increase; since, for an explanation which has a seeming feasibility, it substitutes an explanation which, carrying us back only a certain distance, there leaves us in the presence of the avowedly inexplicable.

Under one of its aspects scientific progress is a gradual transfiguration of Nature. Where ordinary perfection saw perfect simplicity, it reveals great complexity; where there seemed absolute inertness, it discloses intense activity; and in what appears mere vacancy it finds a marvellous play of forces. Each generation of physicists discovers in so-called "brute manner" powers which but a few years before the most instructed physicists would have thought incredible; as instance the ability of a mere iron plate to take up the complicated aerial vibrations produced by articulate speech, which, all translated into multitudinous and varied electric pulses, are re-translated a thousand miles off by another iron plate, and again heard as articulate speech. When the explorer of Nature sees that quiescent as they appear, surrounding solid bodies are thus sensitive to forces which are infinitesimal in their amounts—when the spectroscope proves to him that molecules on the Earth pulsate in harmony with molecules in the stars—when there is forced on him the inference

that every point in space thrills with an infinity of vibrations passing through it in all directions; the conception to which he tends is much less than that of a Universe of dead matter than that of a Universe everywhere alive: alive if not in the restricted sense, yet still in a general sense.

This transfiguration which the inquiries of physicists continually increase, is aided by that other transfiguration resulting from metaphysical inquiries. Subjective analysis compels us to admit that our scientific interpretations of the phenomena which objects present, are expressed in terms of our own variously-combined sensations and ideas—are expressed, that is, in elements belonging to consciousness, which are but symbols of the something beyond consciousness. Though analysis afterwards reinstates our primitive beliefs, to the extent of showing that behind every group of phenomenal manifestations there is always a *neous*, which is the reality that remains fixed amid appearances which are variable; yet we are shown that this *neous* of reality is for ever inaccessible to consciousness. And when, once more, we remember that the activities constituting consciousness, being rigorously bounded, cannot bring in among themselves the activities beyond the bounds, which therefore seem unconscious, though production of either by the other seems to imply that they are of the same essential nature; this necessity we are under to think of the external energy in terms of the internal energy, gives rather a spiritualistic than a materialistic aspect to the Universe: further thought, however, obliging us to recognise the truth that a conception in phenomenal manifestations of this ultimate energy can in no wise show us what it is.

While the beliefs to which analytic science thus leads are such as do not destroy the object-matter of religion, but simply transfigure it, science under its concrete forms enlarges the sphere for religious sentiment. From the very beginning the progress of knowledge has been accompanied by an increasing capacity for wonder. Among savages, the lowest are the least surprised when shown remarkable products of civilised art: astonishing the traveller by their indifference. And so little of the marvellous do they perceive in the grandest phenomena of Nature, that any inquiries concerning them they regard as childish trifling. This contrast in mental attitude between the lowest human beings and the higher human beings around us, is paralleled by the contrasts among the grades of these higher human beings themselves. It is not the rustic, nor the artisan, nor the trader, who sees something more than a mere matter of course in the hatching of a chick; but it is the biologist, who, pushing to the uttermost his analysis of vital phenomena, reaches his greatest perplexity when a speck of protoplasm under the microscope shows him life in its simplest form, and makes him feel that however he formulates its processes the actual play of forces remains unimaginable. Neither in the ordinary tourist nor in the deer-stalker climbing the mountains above him, does a highland glen rouse ideas beyond those of sport or of the picturesque; but it may, and often does, in the geologist. He, observing that the glacier-rounded rock he sits on has lost by weathering but half an inch of its surface since a time far more remote than the beginnings of human civilisation, and then trying to conceive the slow denudation which has cut out the whole valley, has thoughts of time and of power to which they are strangers—thoughts which already utterly inadequate to their objects, he feels to be still more futile on noting the contorted beds of gneiss around, which tell him of a time, immeasurably more remote, when far beneath the Earth's surface they were in a half-melted state, and again tell him of a time, immensely exceeding this in remoteness, when their components were sand and mud on the shores of an ancient sea. Nor is it in the primitive peoples who supposed that the heavens rested on the mountain tops, any more than in the modern inheritors of their cosmogony who repeat that "the heavens declare the glory of God," that we find the largest conceptions of the Universe or the greatest amount of wonder excited by contemplation of it. Rather, it is in the astronomer, who sees in the Sun a mass so vast that even into one of his spots our Earth might be plunged without touching its edges; and who by every finer telescope is shown an increased multitude of such suns, many of them far larger.

Hereafter as heretofore, higher faculty and deeper insight will raise rather than lower this sentiment. At present the most powerful and most instructed intellect has neither the knowledge nor the capacity required for symbolizing in thought the totality of things. Occupied with one or other division of Nature, the man of science usually does not know enough of the other divisions even to rudely conceive the extent and complexity of their phenomena; and supposing him to have adequate knowledge of each, yet he is unable to think of them as a whole. Wider and more complex intellect may hereafter help him to form a vague consciousness of them in their totality. We may say that just as an undeveloped musical faculty, able only to appreciate a simple melody, cannot grasp the variously-entangled passages and harmonies of a symphony, which in the minds of composer and conductor, are unified into involved musical effects awakening far greater feeling than is possible to the musically uncultured; so, by future more evolved intelligences, the course of things now apprehensible only in parts may be apprehensible all together, with an accompanying feeling as much beyond that of the present cultured man, as his feeling is beyond that of the savage.

And this feeling is not likely to be decreased but increased by that analysis of knowledge which, while forcing him to Agnosticism, yet continually prompts him to imagine some solution of the Great Enigma which he knows cannot be solved. Especially must this be so when he remembers that the very notions, beginning and end, cause and purpose, are relative notions belonging to human thought, which are probably inapplicable to the Ultimate Reality transcending human thought; and when, though suspecting that explanation is a word without meaning when applied to this Ultimate Reality, he yet feels compelled to think there must be an explanation.

But amid the mysteries which become the more mysterious the more they are thought about, there will remain the one absolute certainty, that he is ever in presence of an Infinite and Eternal Energy, from which all things proceed.—HERBERT SPENCER.