

THE WEEK.

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SPENCER'S "ECCLESIASTICAL INSTITUTIONS."

MR. HERBERT SPENCER necessarily approaches the subject of religion and religious institutions with a settled conviction that there is nothing in Heaven or Earth which is not dreamed of in a physical philosophy. He is also bound to make all things accommodate themselves to the Spencerian law of Evolution, according to which the occupation of the Supreme Being, or, if the term is preferred, the Supreme Force, is the everlasting conversion of the Homogeneous into the Heterogeneous, and of the Heterogeneous back into the Homogeneous, through alternating processes of differentiation and integration, that which is done by the first process being always undone by the second; albeit, to our moral apprehension, this endless rotation of mechanical construction and demolition, one as aimless as the other, seems a sorry employment for the Eternal, and far below that of even a mortal who is struggling or helping others to struggle towards a higher character and life. Moreover, Mr. Spencer has a strong sense of the ethical aberrations of the clergy, which is sometimes allowed a little to disturb his philosophy. He has evidently a more than scientific pleasure in likening the practice of an Archbishop of Canterbury, who composes a prayer for Divine protection in war, to those of a priest of the Comanches, with an intimation that of the two the Archbishop is the worse; in tracing the affinities of the Book of Common Prayer to the functions of the Medicine Man, and in connecting a case of bullying at King's College with the religious object of the foundation and the clerical character of the staff. Political Prelacy and the political action of the clergy generally have wrought much evil, and brought much scandal on religion; but they must be held to be entirely separable not only from Theism but from Christianity, seeing that in the first ages of Christianity, while it was winning the world, there was assuredly neither prelate nor clergyman. This, no doubt, Mr. Spencer clearly perceives and would admit; but his innuendoes are somewhat sweeping.

However, it matters not what Mr. Spencer's prepossessions may be nor need we enter into the general question between him and his religious opponents. He here propounds a special theory as to the genesis of religion. All religion, he says, without exception has its origin in a belief in ghosts or doubles, particularly in the ghosts or doubles of powerful and masterful chiefs or venerated ancestors. The belief in ghosts or doubles again has its origin in dreams. Religion, in a word, is apotheosis gradually subtilized and sublimated by the influences of advancing civilization, till it becomes Monotheism and a moral religion.

The reality of apotheosis or of ancestor-worship nobody doubts. We have in historic times the deification of Greek heroes and of Roman Emperors; we have, what is very like deification, the canonization of Saints in Roman Catholic and in Mahometan countries, though it might be difficult to connect the canonization of Saints at all events with the belief in doubles, the idea in this case certainly being that the self-same martyr or ascetic still lived in God. But when we proceed to resolve

all religion into apotheosis, a question at once presents itself to which, so far as we can see, Mr. Spencer's treatise furnishes no answer. To elevate a man into divinity you must apparently first have a notion of a divine nature. The double of a chief or ancestor is, in itself, the double of a chief or ancestor and nothing more; multiply the counterpart *ad infinitum* and it will still be the counterpart of a man, however powerful and masterful, or however venerated, and not a god. To turn it into a god a radically different conception must come in. We see this plainly in such a case as the conversion of Brasidas into an object of worship by the gratitude of those whom he had liberated, or the deification of the Roman Emperors dead or living, in a transport of servile adulation. The notion of Deity once given, apotheosis is easily understood; but otherwise it seems to require an explanation which we do not find in Mr. Spencer's pages. Nor does it signify how far back we go in the history of the human mind. Let each of the two notions, that of a ghost or double and that of Deity, be as rudimentary as you please, there is apparently still a fundamental difference between them which forbids us to believe that the one is merely the offspring or development of the other.

For his inductive evidences Mr. Spencer goes chiefly to savage tribes. But why, it must be asked once more, are savage tribes to be recognized as our oracles in questions concerning the mental history of man? By the most competent authorities the testimony of savages as to their own beliefs and traditions is regarded as by no means trustworthy: by the savages of this continent, certainly, plenty of cock-and-bull stories have been told. But supposing the testimony accurate, their beliefs are those of the rejected members of humanity embruted and arrested in their development by adverse circumstances of climate, soil, or situation. Why are we to look here for the basis of our induction? Why should we not rather turn to the main stream of human progress and the history of the great religions? What is the evidence of the Rig Veda, of the Zendavesta, of the Egyptian mythology, of the Hebrew records, of the Homeric poems, of the Roman Pantheon? Do not all these clearly indicate that religion had its origin not in ghosts, or apotheosis, but in an idea and a sentiment awakened by the powers and luminaries of nature, especially by the sun? The deities of the Rig Veda are Agni, Fire; Sourya, the Sun; Indra, the Air, with its fertilizing rains; Varouna, the Vault of Heaven. Those of Egypt are also manifestly elemental, the sun holding the chief place; nobody can doubt this after reading the analysis of the Egyptian religion, given by Renouf, who, by the way, positively rejects Mr. Spencer's hypothesis, and even thinks that there is evidence to show that the Monotheistic conception of a Universal Power preceded the Polytheism of Egypt. It is needless to say that the Homeric Gods are manifestly the presiding spirits of the great objects and departments of nature, though invested with a human personality by the lively fancy of the Greek. Ghosts, doubles, and worship of ancestors occupy in all the great religions an entirely distinct and subordinate place; nor does there appear any trace of that process of transition from them to the greater deities which Mr. Spencer's hypothesis assumes. In the Homeric Poems the shades of the greatest chiefs appear in Hades, leading a sad and feeble existence apart from the land of the living. The shade of Patroclus appears to Achilles, but only before the performance of the funeral rites necessary to give the shade its passport to the better world. We recollect nothing in Homer like a worship of ghosts or doubles.

Mr. Spencer labours hard and evidently with gusto to show that the Hebrew religion is not a revelation, but is traceable to the same origin and stands on exactly the same footing as the rest. His arguments are mainly derived from analysis of ritual. Whether the origin of a belief be human or divine, the expression of it in forms, ceremonies, and postures must be human, so that the mere identification of Hebrew forms, ceremonies, or postures, with those of other races, would not prove that the origin of the Hebrew religion was human. But this is not the present question. The present question is whether the Hebrew religion can be shown to have been developed out of a belief in ghosts. No real proof that it was given by Mr. Spencer. He tells us that "under the common title Elohim were comprehended distinguished living persons, ordinary ghosts, superior ghosts, or gods." But this is pure assumption. Elohim is plural in form, and must have meant originally The Powers; but that these Powers were either distinguished living persons or ghosts, ordinary or extraordinary, is what we should like to see proved. We should also like to see proof of