

EVOLUTION AND MODERN "PSYCHISM."

BY J. SPENCER ELLIS.

THE clever article by Mr. Underwood, entitled "Evolution and the God Idea," which appeared in the December number of the DOMINION REVIEW, while admirable in many ways, seems to call for some remarks in regard to a few matters of great importance. The history of philosophy has been almost as full of folly and arrogance as that of religion, and I think from the same cause,—radically, that the philosopher, like the theologian, has attempted to deal with matters that are utterly beyond the grasp of the human mind. The problems of existence and of the origin and destiny of the universe, have been attacked by both the theologian and the philosopher in all ages, and have naturally led to dogmatism and persecution in the church and to interminable disputes in metaphysics. The reason seems to be the same in both cases. Instead of commencing, in a true philosophical method, with a clear definition of terms, or with a terminology that has a real meaning—carrying out the inexorable rule, if truth is to be arrived at, that "every proposition must be stated in terms of the known"—certain terms have been used and treated as the foundation of valid arguments, though these are terms concerning which opinions are the most divided and of which our real knowledge is the most meagre. The theologian has argued about "god" and "the supernatural," "heaven" and "hell," and so on, the metaphysician of "the soul," "spirit," "noumena," "ego," "infinity," etc., and, without attempting to state what these terms really include, have proceeded to discuss them as if their contents were well known and needed no definition. The results have been sufficiently grave to make us beware of the use of words which possess no tangible meaning, a use which in our own day is leading large numbers of Free-thinkers, but yesterday emancipated from one superstition, into another hardly less deleterious to their mentality. It seems to me that Mr. Underwood, in the article referred to, lends himself, perhaps unintentionally, to this movement.

It is an easy task to show how Evolution disposes of the "innate idea" of god. Perhaps Mr. Underwood might have taken a shorter method, and founded his refutation on the fact that *one intelligent man* can be found who has no idea of any sort concerning god. Mr. Underwood himself, and many other well-known Free-thinkers, could be cited who are totally wanting in any idea of deity; and the theory is necessarily exploded without any further argument than the one fact which is irreconcilably and diametrically opposed to it; even were it not the case that it is utterly vitiated for want of a definition of its chief term, whatever may be the idea involved in the phrase, "a broader view of god." Mr. Underwood rightly says: