

Contributed Articles.

HERBERT SPENCER'S EXPLANATION OF THE ORIGIN OF RELIGION.

POSITIVISM and agnosticism are twin brothers. Their voice is often lifted up in the field of scientific research, and their influence pervades much of the advanced thought of the present day. Comte is the sage of positivism and Spencer is the prophet of agnosticism. Spencer is usually regarded as the English exponent of positivism, but it is more correct to rank Frederic Harrison as the representative English positivist. Spencer is rather the great exponent of materialistic evolution and scientific agnosticism at the present day. It is to be observed that the hypothesis of evolution is given much wider application by Spencer than by Darwin. Darwin and Wallace the joint exponents of the recent phases of the theory confine it almost entirely to the biological sphere. This they do much more carefully than Lamarck and the author of the *Vestiges of Creation*, who were the forerunners of Darwin and Wallace. Spencer, on the other hand, undertakes to embrace all phenomena under the scope of the evolutionary hypothesis. Thus material, vital, mental, moral, social and religious facts are brought under its universal sway. This being the lofty aim of Spencer's philosophy he must account for the phenomena of religion in a purely naturalistic way, and in accordance with the hypothesis of evolution. Spencer does not shrink from the task, and so in his philosophy we have a most thorough going attempt to explain the origin of religious belief and practices in harmony with the principles of materialistic evolution and scientific agnosticism.

It is not possible to sketch at any length the main principles of Spencer's philosophy. It is a vast monistic system, viewed under materialistic aspects. The principle of the development of the universe from its primitive atomic homogeneousness to its subsequent heterogeneous condition is that of natural evolution proceeding by the law of rhythm, and resulting in successive differentiations. The fact of force or the reality of power has an important