PART II.—REVIEWS.

Philosophy without Assumptions. By Thomas Penyngton Kirkman, M.A., F.R.S. London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1876.

Mr. Kirkman has decided convictions, and does not hesitate to express them in plain-spoken language. He criticizes the principal teachers of the growing school of materialism in an unsparing fashion; and those who assent not to his propositions and arguments may not be at all sorry to see the views of these gentlemen assailed with vigour and vivacity. It will do no harm to put them on their defence from a philosophical standpoint. Their easy triumph over unwise theological opponents, or rather the triumph of scientific thought in their persons, has not been altogether good for them; some of them having raised their eyes so far above their feet that they seem not to see where they are walking, and evincing a self-sufficiency which becomes them as ill as it became the theologists whose bigotry they reprobate. It must be confessed that those who pursue the study of the physical sciences do appear, in their enthusiasm for their special work, frequently to lose sight of that which is the end of all science, and to propound as sufficient for human instruction, guidance, and conduct, that which is practically a negation of anything like a doctrine adequate to embrace the phenomena of human feeling and conduct. Men will have some faith to live by. Revolutions in human conduct do not appear to have come from the intellect in times past; again and again that which seemed the foolishness of the simple has confounded the wisdom of the wise; and it is not impossible that, when the students of physical science have made it all so plain that a wayfaring man, though a fool, cannot go wrong, if he will only keep his eyes open, some untaught person "out of Galilee," a friend of publicans and sinners, who happens to be inspired by strong moral sympathies, will stir up a wave of feeling which shall sweep over the paths, and hardly leave a trace of them behind.

Mr. Kirkman is indignant with the philosophers who set out with an assortment of abstract terms, which they neither define nor comprehend exactly, and insists that no man who undertakes to teach "ought to employ an abstract term,

much less an abstract trope, in which ambiguity is possible, until he has an exact meaning as well as use for it, and is ready to impart that meaning to the student whom he has prepared to comprehend it, or else to show him how to find the meaning for himself." It must be acknowledged that there is a sting of truth in the following remarks:—

David Hume wrote a famous chapter on the Idea of Necessary Connexion, which contains not a word of explanation either of the adjective Necessary, or of the trope Connexion, which appear in the subjects and predicates of his dogmas; except that in one page the trope is made more intelligible by printing it CONNEXION; and he proves it at last to be absolutely without sense. Of all the marshallers of abstract truths whom I know, Immanuel Kant is king. He goes out to sea with a wonderful display of bunting inscribed with generals and abstracts in *-ung* and *-niss* and *-heit* and *-keit;* and then, after steaming away for 273 pages, it comes into his head that a little definition may be useful; whereupon he runs up more bunting, and gives us the pleasure—and this is all he gives—of reading under his leading German terms their Latin equivalent is *-tus* and *-tio*."

He is particularly severe upon Mr. Herbert Spencer, whose assumptions, inconsistencies, inexact employment of terms in a double sense, and errors he exposes with hearty vigour. The phraseology of this author evokes the following amusing comment:—

"Evolution is a change from an indefinite incoherent homogeneity to a definite coherent heterogeneity, through continuous differentiations and integrations." *Id est Anglicè.* Evolution is a change from a nohowish untalkaboutable all-alikeness to a somehowish and in-general-talkaboutable not-all-alikeness by continuous somethingelsification and sticktogetheration. Can any man shew that my translation is unfair? When that is shewn, I will make a becoming apology for the unfairness.

And again:—

I am convinced that he and his admirers are familiar with dozens of long words in -eity and -ality, in -ility and -ivity, and -ation, about whose definitions they seldom trouble themselves; especially those imperial terms, the differentiation, and the integration, and the co-ordination, and the re-differentiation of the simultaneities and the serialities, of the progressions, the coherences, the relativities, and the correspondences. Why in the world need they trouble themselves? Those long-tailed abstracts know how to take good care of themselves:

you may knock them about in heaps as you please; they never fail to tumble up as clear and perfect as when new from the mint, and at a glance you can distinguish them, and swear to them again. Time enough to bother yourself about exact definitions, applications, and verifications when you have finished philosophising in general.

But it is in a chapter on the Will, in which he criticises what Mr. Spencer has written concerning the doctrines of personal identity, and freedom of the will, that he comes to close quarters, and delivers some uglily effective thrusts. The following extract may serve as a sample:—

Here the reader may well ask, Is there nothing in this section besides the dogmatic assertions that you have quoted, with their decorations of absurdity—is there nothing like argument for the demolition of subsisting personal identity? I am happy to say there is one, though but one, argument: it is only a little one, and the reader shall have it, word for word. We read in this same section: "Either the *Ego*, which is supposed to determine or will the action, is present in consciousness or it is not." That is promising, and looks like close quarters; that is verily the way in which a good reasoner opens an exhaustive argument. He goes on: "If it is not present in consciousness, it is something of which we are unconscious—something, therefore, of whose existence we neither have nor can have any evidence?" That you say may pass for true, if it is not very profound. Let me entreat your attention to the remainder. "If it is present in consciousness, then, as it *is ever present*, it can be at each moment nothing else than the state of consciousness, simple or compound, *passing* at the moment!"* You all seem puzzled. I will give him a fair chance; I will read it once more. You are bothered still: you ask me whether there is not some printer's blunder in the third part; the very question I should ask if in your place. . . . How can the fact that is ever present, and not passing, be a demonstration that it is nothing else than what is passing at the moment? To all the wits I have this is deplorable nonsense. And if it were sense, where is the argument that he promised us in that logical flourish at the beginning? He wants to prove to us that the *Ego* is nothing else than the state of consciousness passing at the moment. And he proves it simply thus, by shouting out, louder than before, "It can be nothing else!" To me it is "helpless, hopeless nonsense all." Here we see what a figure Mr. Spencer cuts when, alighting from his balloon, he tries, what he does not attempt once in three hundred pages, to go in to a definite position on solid ground, and handle his logical weapon at close quarters. He seems dreadfully puzzled about which is the right and which the wrong end of it.

* The italics are ours: we have placed them, in order to accentuate the contradiction which Mr. Kirkman fastens upon, because we have omitted some of his argument.

There is much more of the same sort, for which we must refer readers to the book itself. Nor is Mr. Spencer the only person whom the author belabours; Mr. Matthew Arnold, Professor Tyndal, and John Stuart Mill are hardly less severely handled. It is a pity, we think, for the sake of his arguments and the points which he makes, that his style is not a little less rollicking, and his language a little more sober and temperate; we have no sympathy with that affectation of courtesy in controversy which induces a person to flatter his adversary while pulling his arguments to pieces, as well as he can; but Mr. Kirkman's style will offend some readers, while others are not unlikely to think that he is joking, and to fail, therefore, to give the serious consideration which they deserve to some of his criticisms.

What is Mr. Kirkman's "Philosophy without Assumptions?" That is more than we can venture to explain in the space at our disposal. It might be described, not unfairly, perhaps, as a scepticism of everything, except certain so-called fundamental deliverances of consciousness. Here is a proposition which will indicate its nature:—"*The only force which is directly given and immediately known to me is my own will-force; and all my knowledge of other forces acting in the Cosmos is mediate, and found by me in logical inference.*" Mr. Kirkman, though a clergyman, has no fear of doubt; he outdoubts the physical philosophers, showing them that they make not a proper and thorough use of scepticism, and that they are vanquished with their own weapon when it is rightly used. Here are some sound remarks concerning doubt:—

> If you would learn to reason closely, you must learn to be a good doubter. Doubt, determined doubt, is the only key which unlocks the caskets of certain knowledge. We have so many lame philosophers because we have so few thorough doubters. It is not the spirit of doubt, as we bishops and parsons sing, which hinders the progress of truth and religion; but the spirit of assumption. Why have we all these disgraceful divisions, wranglings and heartburnings in science and theology? It is not because men will doubt too much, but because they will not doubt enough. It is because they hate the trouble of doubting in themselves, and resent its reasonable demands in others, that we are flooded with sham philosophies, superstitions, and infidelities.

Another quotation, which shall be the last, summarises the author's conclusions against the materialist philosophers:—

Here lies their blunder, that they conceive the stupendous forces of nature, and along with them other human will and consciousness, to be all alike, directly, separately, and independently, given to them. They fancy themselves beings of a superior world, floating in the air, and looking down on man and the surrounding energies all objectively submitted to them, alike human desires and human will, along with the other activities of heaven and earth, for their inspection and comparison. But the truth is, that no force whatever is given to them, but as a function of their own will—a function so to speak of the form *w.f. (w.)*, where *w* is the acting will-force—a function vanishing with *w*; that is to say, that if they were deprived of all consciousness and memory of will, no conception whatever of verified force would remain in them. Nor can they eliminate this *w* from their expression of any force, or from their reasonings about it. They may talk of the lightning's speed, or of the distance from earth of the furthest nebula, or of the living force of planets or of suns; but all these fine words are intelligible only because they suggest multiples of their own remembered will-effort. Will is not a force given to them externally among a number of other more commanding forces equally observed by them; nor can it be found or described as a resultant or product of such forces. The truth is, that no force of the external world is ever properly and directly observed, but rather inferred by them from their consciousness of baffled will.

The substance of Mr. Kirkman's book, when not purely critical, is a professed demonstration of this theory.

Philosophy and its Foundations: with an Appeal to Spiritual Psychology. London: Simpkin, Marshall and Co. 1876.

When we read some of the high-reaching metaphysical speculations which are contained in this essay, for which the author modestly begs a fair and serious consideration, in the evident conviction that he has thrown a flood of light upon questions that have so long perplexed the minds of men; when we see English men and women stand for hours to wait for, or rush in eager crowds to cheer frantically, a passing carriage because it contains two persons who are privileged by the laws of the country to style themselves Royal Highnesses, or read of the frantic rush which these same people will make to get possession of the cherry stones which a Royal Highness has spat out after eating the cherries;—we are so little in accord with the thoughts and feelings which animate beings who so think, feel, and act, so utterly insensible to any common sympathies, that we sometimes feel a grave doubt whether we actually belong to the

https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.22.98.288 Published online by Cambridge University Press