

ARTICLE VIII.

CRITICAL NOTE.

HOW MUCH DO WE KNOW OF THE NEW BIRTH BY CONSCIOUSNESS? AND WHAT?

IN order to any satisfactory discussion of the questions put to me in the April number of this Review, by Professor Frank Hugh Foster, Ph. D., of Pacific Theological Seminary, it is necessary to restate the main question with more precision and correctness. This I have done above. As drawn up by him¹ it implies that I have denied that we "know *anything* by consciousness" on the subject and related ones to which he refers, by asking: "Do we know anything," etc. But this is quite wide of the truth. In the *Christian Mirror*² my only denial was just this: One "is surely not *conscious*, in any proper language or correct thinking, of the objective truth of all that 'system' which was the instrument of the change." This followed criticism on his article in this Review,³ that it is "unclear what and how far immediate internal consciousness" is held by him to "know." This is the question I am to discuss, and not the other, and different, and far broader one substituted by Professor Foster.

He avers that the Christian does know "by immediate consciousness *something about* the New Birth." Undoubtedly he does. What Christian would think of denying it? Certainly I have not. All the books of logic teach that while a universal affirmative and a universal negative are contradictories and exclude one another, a particular affirmative and a particular negative are alternate propositions and allow each other. In questioning the assertion that we know some things, one tacitly admits that we know some (other) things. Professor Foster suggested my denial quoted above, as to knowing an objective "system" by consciousness, when he asked: "Is it scientific to throw away what you actually know of it by the testimony of immediate internal consciousness?" It is certainly unscientific to throw away what is really known by *any* faculty of knowledge, for science just coordinates what is known. But the query seemed inexact. So I raised the other question—as above—of what and how much? Indeed, Professor Foster himself starts by saying that I merely "questioned the assertion that we know *some things about* Christian *doctrine* by consciousness," which is entirely true, and is all that is true.

If I were to restate the main question by substituting a different univer-

¹ Bibliotheca Sacra, p. 344. ² Dec. 19, 1892. ³ April, 1891, p. 260.

sal for Professor Foster's, thus: "Do we know *everything* as to the New Birth by consciousness?" I should prove an unfair disputant; for I do not see that he has asserted this, as I have not asserted the opposite universal. It is too common an expedient of disputants to oppose some proposition of others as taken universally, thus tacitly making the unsustained impression that it is not true as taken particularly, or in part. The question before us is: What, among the things variously known as to the New Birth, are particularly known by consciousness, and not by other faculties? This disentanglement of the true issue drops out a number of very true things which Professor Foster has said.

It is also to be noted, as still further clearing and simplifying the issue, that Professor Foster recognizes the action in respect to the New Birth of other mental faculties which are not consciousness. Thus, "he may be said to know by the *next step* from consciousness, if not by immediate consciousness," "I am thereby *conscious*, or I *infer without conscious process* of reasoning," "the step of inference is exceedingly short," "the Christian perceives upon reflection," "has consciousness, or, if you prefer, knowledge by immediate inference, . . . founded upon easy inference from facts of immediate consciousness." There is hardly any need of questioning the philosophical accuracy of all this, and hardly more of pointing out that the Christian is not, psychologically speaking, conscious in place of knowing in these other ways, but is decisively conscious of knowing things in these other ways, i. e. by the action of other mental faculties.

There would be no great risk in resting the issue here, but for the fact that with these sound distinctions and wholesome admissions are blended statements I should be sorry to seem to any one to accept, as I do these. "The man knows by immediate consciousness that he is a *sinner*," may pass as a popular statement, though conscience is ignored.—But what follows can hardly pass analytically—"He knows, that is, *what* are the prevailing tendencies of his being, and what their *character*." Nothing is easier than thus to confound conscience as acting, with the mind's knowledge of its acts, and ascribe its proper function of discriminating the moral character of acts and tendencies to consciousness, which gives us no information about moral character, or, if it does, leaves conscience altogether shorn of its proper function. Still more unwilling should I be to ascribe to the former alone all our complex and blended knowledge "of sin, bondage, freedom, duty, the influences proceeding from [our] own nature, other influences not [ourselves] making for righteousness, the actual fundamental choice, the harmonious play of moral faculties."¹ Other faculties, equally given us of God, are indispensable here, though consciousness has its own part. One may adopt Schnedermann's words, "Nowhere has a man ever put forth a formulated expression of the Christian faith without employing his consciousness," and not by any means imply that he employed nothing else, spinning all truth out of his own subjective phenomena. That would be to

¹ "Which we ordinarily style peace, or forgiveness."

transform the microcosm of theology into a macrocosm with a vengeance. Better than this was the distinction made in Professor Foster's second article in this Review.¹ Forgiveness of sin, or, to separate sharply the immediate from the inferential element, peace following upon confession and surrender, as a *sense* of harmony in the play of the moral faculties, is a fact of consciousness"—i. e. known by it, as any mental pleasure is. "The ultimate facts give rise to certain inferences which do not possess the same character of immediate evidence, but which may properly be called a part of Christian experience, since they enter into that experience, though inferentially." This is, indeed, but one form of mental fact familiar to all students of psychology, viz. that what we call experience, (by the senses, for example,) is largely composed of acts of judgment, interpretation, and reasoning, which are other acts of intellectual experience, and not of sense perception at all.

Mingled with psychological descriptions that need not be questioned are bits of argument that do not convince me. Thus, describing a "consciousness of involuntary modification" (of our acts), he asks: "How can there be consciousness 'of modification' without consciousness of a modifier? How consciousness of any term and a relation, without consciousness of the other term with which there is relation?" I suspect that the word "relation" here begs the question. And the word "modification" may also. It certainly draws in more than is matter of immediate consciousness, viz. memory of past acts from which the judgment affirms that present ones differ. Without disturbing here the ponderous German question of identification (so-called) of subject and object, or asking whether, as Porter affirms, we are conscious of the object, *as non ego*, "somewhat as we are conscious of the *ego*" (which I doubt), I am better satisfied with Professor Foster's summing up as to reflection and immediate inference knowing the modifying agent. And I am satisfied that intuition also plays its part here, for an intuitive sense of power involved in all our acts—involuntary as well as voluntary—is at once called out by all our acting. But intuition is no more consciousness than is inference, reflection, reasoning, or judgment.

So of the argument for the freedom of the will. One may be sure of freedom as a mental fact without being obliged to credit the knowledge of it to mere consciousness.² To me it is involved or implied in the nature of all choice. This is why I cheerfully "confess that man is *not conscious* of compelled choices (subjective), which by analysis would not be choices at all. I should not depend upon his being "not conscious of compelling forces," or upon the idea that this is the same as being "conscious that such forces *do not* operate upon his mind," for to me there is a very substantial difference between being unconscious of one thing and conscious of its opposite. I may be unconscious of hearing a man who is actually speaking to me, but this is quite another thing from being conscious that he is not speaking,—an expression

¹ Oct. 1891, p. 589.

² The same is true of ability and responsibility. Cf. Bib Sac., Oct. 1891, p. 588.

to which I find it hard to give any meaning whatever, as he alone could be conscious of his own act. But Professor Foster (p. 345) ascribes conviction of what acts upon us to something else, viz. "the *next step* from consciousness."

Now (1) the New Birth is a change, a spiritual change, of more than the will—my studies in psychology have led me to think—viz. of the whole soul, so far as its spiritual activities and attitude toward God and eternal right are concerned. That every converted soul is conscious of wicked states of more than the will that go before conversion, and of devout, submissive, loving exercises that come after it, there is no room to doubt. But it is worth while to ask ourselves what we mean when we say we are also conscious of this transition. We have other faculties that tell us there has been one, nay assure us of it. But the new Christian choice, of which one may be entirely conscious, is not the same thing with the difference between itself and the old worldly choice. Consciousness is amply sufficient to inform us of each, *per se*; and judgment and conscience as well of the utter moral contrast between them. What more can we mean by saying we are conscious of this change as well as of those choices, thus denying to other faculties their clear offices? No need to fall back on Sir Wm. Hamilton's postulate that beginning and change of existence are in themselves unknowable. Our question is a distinct one, By what power of the mind is any change as such known? By that which reports all the internal acts we perform? But a transition from one style of action to another is not itself a state or an act. It does not need to be: the old action and the new are enough in order to know the change—one succeeding the other is enough. We have sensations of black and of white; but not sensations proper of the difference between them. This is a purely mental perception, comparing the sense perception of black and the perception (or memory, as the case may be) of white. We know each mental state in its moment of occurrence by consciousness; and also that it is a new, or beginning state, Sir Wm. Hamilton to the contrary notwithstanding; and they are distinguishable pieces of knowledge, though simultaneous. We have Professor Foster with us here. "The word 'consciousness' is employed here in the strict philosophical sense, as the knowledge which the mind has of its own action,"—"strictly has relation *only* to the mind's knowledge of its own activities." Sin is one use of its activities; obeying God, another. In being conscious of each in succession the soul has all it needs in order to be certain of the great change. We form then, indeed, the idea of change as involved in the consecutiveness of unholy (or unregenerate) and holy (or regenerate) phenomena of mind; but this idea of change is formed by reason, not by consciousness, though we denominate it as if it were some *tertium quid* (as it certainly differs ideally from the two phenomena distinguished from it); some third act of the same faculty. But this, in clear analysis, it is not. Being conscious of forming this third idea, and also being conscious of the phenomenon for which it stands before the mind, cannot be one and the same thing. Yet popular, indiscriminating language will always confound them as such.

And (2) passing this, the author of the great change is still farther beyond the scope of consciousness. It is not large enough to include him. This is the critical point. The converted man "is conscious, strictly speaking, of certain *influences* not himself; is there any 'consciousness' of the Not-himself?" I will not say that Professor Foster here begs the question by the word "influences,"¹ but his having clearly discriminated the mind's knowledge of *its own* activity from anything other than this negatives the question he now puts, unless, indeed, what no one will pretend, one's own action and "the Not-himself" are one and the same. He seems to vacillate here and elsewhere between his own view and what I deem the more philosophical and accurate one. For the latter he lays a basis, indeed, in admitting that "there are two sides of the New Birth, the divine and the human . . . a better philosophy of the will has led most theologians of the present day to make this, or some similar distinction between the divine and the human activity." Then consciousness of the latter activity is not, and cannot be, consciousness of the former.

Or, in another way analysis may show that consciousness is overcharged as to our knowledge of the New Birth. No moral act of the soul comes between its last unregenerate act and its first regenerate one. The New Birth being instantaneous as a spiritual beginning of action and character, the latter joins on to the former in the nature of the case, with no uncharactered interval between. Dr. N. W. Taylor, of Yale Seminary, did indeed maintain that for an instant innocent natural self-love assumed sway where selfishness has reigned up to that instant, giving the Holy Spirit its regenerating opportunity, and is instantaneously succeeded by the reign of the Spirit in a heart now becoming holy and saved. If he has had followers in this they are not known in our metaphysical divinity, the difficulty of an act of innocent self-love by a sinful soul being insurmountable. There is then no act between the last sinful one and the first regenerate one, which can be an *act* of change to be conscious of. Indeed, this word "change" simply signifies the moral difference between the two immediately successive acts, which is apprehended, not by consciousness—no difference in the quality of acts being known by some other faculty than judgment, which is just our power of making comparisons. In this case, moreover, as in all others, it is the accompanying and instantaneous concepts of the two moral acts which enter into the comparison, and there is no third concept (e. g. of change) imagined to be compared with either. *Consciousness just reports the two acts which end and begin spiritual character; judgment,—or conscience if you will, for it is a judgment of what is moral,—reporting the difference between them.* And it is, of course, philosophically incorrect to lump two acts with consciousness, at different instants (with a concomitant moral judgment) all together, and dub the complex whole one act or experience of consciousness.

¹ As the question of causation used to be made ambiguous and clouded by the easy use of the word "effect" in place of the simpler and more analytical term "event." An effect of course implies a cause.

Again, that person of the Godhead whose agency produces the first regenerate or holy act in us through the truth is the Holy Spirit. Without disturbing the question of separate consciousnesses in the Trinity, or asking, Are the Father and the Son also conscious of the Spirit's regenerative act, at the instant it occurs, I may without hesitation aver that no created being can possibly have this Divine consciousness of regenerative power in exercise. For the Being who regenerates can alone be conscious of willing and doing it as his own personal act, all Divine. Man, then, is utterly incapable of this consciousness, being incapable of the regenerating act as to himself or as to another, or in other words, man can be conscious only of human mental acts, and not of Divine ones. But the only sense in which God is conscious of the New Birth in us is that, working causatively, he—and he alone—is conscious of every regenerative act of himself as the Holy Spirit.

Every Christian convert is conscious, in the strictest sense, of all that he is capable of being conscious of, viz. a new and unexampled spiritual event in his soul, a godly purpose, with its attendant and necessary incidents of feeling and thought. Of whatever mental acts he is unconscious, these could not occur without his being entirely conscious of them. Their coming into existence in mere subconscious activities I deem impossible. But when he pronounces this or these (as he surely may) the work of another spirit than his own, viz. the Spirit of God working without himself and upon him from above, he goes beyond legitimate absolute personal knowledge of these as mental facts within himself. He adds another principle to consciousness, that of causation, which views mental *events*, like all others, as *effects*. He employs another faculty, that of intuition, always at hand when we know events of any kind. Consciousness may say:—

“Now a new principle takes place
Which guides and animates the will”

as to the detail of executive volition. But when he ascribes this to another spiritual being than himself “implanting” it, as the old phraseology was, in his being, he not only recognizes concrete causation in a new form, but he also recognizes the existence of an external personal cause influencing his mental history from beyond and above the realm of consciousness. God may not be formally thought as Trinity, but the operating, influencing Spirit is certainly thought as concretely, personally divine, *plus* theistic belief, *plus* intuition, and *plus* human consciousness.

Here we plant ourselves firmly—the consciousness of what is man's in or about the New Birth is distinct from, is not, a consciousness of what is God's. Who will say that any knowledge of man is, either *ipso facto* or necessarily, any knowledge of God? There is a loose way of declaring that *in* knowing his works we know him; but his works are never he, nor is he his works. To know effects is always something else than knowing causes, any way. So our Lord taught Nicodemus. The effect of the wind on the ear is perceived, not the wind itself. Here consciousness stops. So in the case of “every one that is born of the Spirit.” The phrase New Birth is

used to include God's act as well as its effect on man. To affirm then, without qualification, that we are conscious of the New Birth in act and fact (which is vastly more than "some things about" it) is to assert, inclusively, that we are conscious of action of God of which we know no more than we do of the birth-place or the goal of the passing wind whose sound we hear. "The New Birth," says Professor Foster, "as a change of purpose, is a fact of the consciousness of the individual." But then, as explained above, and by the same token, the New Birth, as an exercise of the regenerating power of an entirely distinct person, God, is a fact of God's consciousness only, and cannot be of man's.¹

So of the miracles of our Lord. Scripture tells us what followed them. It does not attempt to show how they were wrought, or show God working them. Did those who saw Lazarus come forth *see* the exercise of the wonder-working power in his body, dead four days? Nay, verily. So of our Lord's resurrection. The dead body of Christ was seen before the miracle; the living body after it. Who saw the miracle itself? *No one but God.* How know we, then, that it occurred? It *must* have occurred. It is the only possible, the only thinkable explanation of the after facts. Our mental sanity obliges our thought to accept it. And we are obliged, in a similar way, to accept the explaining fact of the regenerating act of God coming between sin and submission to him. Scripture doctrine tallies perfectly with fact.

It is in strict accord with this that the Scripture witnesses never give any hint of consciousness of miraculous power working in them, on the part of the subjects of miracles. Their previous condition, their after condition, is all. Reason, guided by our ultimate, simple idea, our infallible intuition, of power, is competent to do the rest. The spectators tried to get the parents of him who was born blind to explain that they had sense perception of more than this. "How then doth he now see?" "We know not." The man himself, who had already told them all he knew: "He put clay upon mine eyes, and I washed, and do see," was called. "How opened he thine eyes?" There was a chance for his inner consciousness of an "influencer," a "modifier"—if he had had any. But his only answer was, not this, but a conditional inference of his native reason—"If this man were not from God he could do nothing." "Knowledge founded upon easy inference from facts of immediate consciousness," Professor Foster will join me in saying, truly. So when Paul recites what he had "received" as to our Lord's resurrection, no knowledge by eye-witness of the miracle itself is pretended. Only his burial and his being raised the third day, proven by his appearing to so many afterward, including Paul himself.

May I hope that this analysis does not seem to draw all significance out of the contention analyzed? The things we do surely know by consciousness

¹ Professor Foster's own form of argument ought to be his answer here. "The man is *not* conscious of [regenerating] forces [of his own] operating upon his mind." How can he, then, be conscious of them at all, as the "forces" of another, and that a divine mind?

"about" the New Birth are very precious to us all; though there are some other things which we know otherwise. *And we know them.*¹ My only excuse for undue length is an anxiety to do a little to arrest the inadvertent tendency, even in writers who know much better, to ascribe to our one and simple power of knowing, what our mental faculties do, all that these powers themselves know in their proper functions. It is a very large subject, on which I must not here enter. Some deny that we have really a faculty called consciousness; others lump all the faculties together in it. The materialists and *physical metaphysicians*—I should beg pardon of the English language for these combined words, if they ever begged pardon of philosophy for the combined things!—hardly ever call mind anything else than mere consciousness. Some make this a function of matter; others loosely spread it over the whole of personality—whatever they may mean by this last. If this confusion of thought kept out of religion it would not be nearly so mischievous. Dr. Henry B. Smith said, in his "Apologetics" (p. 76, *note*), "not quite yet in English, *consciousness of God.*" But we have drifted since then a good ways and into many things he would never have theologially or philosophically entertained. Was it mere psychological error, or was it to deify a good and brilliant man, when it was said the other day of the late Phillips Brooks, in a Boston Congregational church, that "his *self-consciousness* was an intense consciousness of God"?

A brief analysis of the phrase "a Not-himself-making-for-righteousness" may interest some student of formal logic as showing in another way that the work of other faculties is incorrectly ascribed to consciousness. It is easily reduced to the form of a logical proposition. Matthew Arnold would say that the subject is a "power" (modified as "Not-himself"); and a teacher of logic would say that the proper copula ("is") and the predicate are blended in the words "making for righteousness"—equivalent to—(which) is *productive of righteousness*. The two terms involve distinct intuitions, power and right, which are necessary to the concretes (power, righteousness), in which they are involved. The copula "is" may be regarded as involving the intuitive idea of being or simple existence. But neither of the three ideas is born of consciousness, which, "in the strict philosophical sense," simply tells the mind it has begotten them. A step farther and it could be shown that the correlation of each of the three to reality is due also to the intuitive faculty, and not to consciousness,—just as the agreement be-

¹ The writer is old enough to remember well when New England pastors *began* to insist that one "can know" that he loves God as well as that he loves parent, or wife, or child. This was long before President Finney proclaimed it in Western New York revivals, or taught it theologially, and the words "conscious," "consciously," and "consciousness," were not in vogue in New England. Indeed, it had been the evangelical fad to be in doubt about everything personal in religion, even that one is included in "He died for *all.*" A good deacon in Maine once reproved another (of the other church in town) for saying that a certain verse of Dr. Watts' ought to read:

"When hanging on the cursed tree
And *knows* her guilt was *there.*"

tween the terms is due to judgment, and not to consciousness. It will be objected that the modifier, "Not-himself," involves an act of consciousness, which is true, but merely a negative one, and this not necessary to the conception of subject, copula, or predicate, or the logical judgment they are employed to express. It may be omitted and there is still left a logical proposition. Hyslop says, in his "Logic" (p. 115), "Modal articles simply modify *attributives*, and no special significance should be attached to them when they do not affect the quantity of the proposition," as "Not-himself" does not here. No logician ascribes the perceived truth of a proposition as such to consciousness, but to judgment alone.

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