VI.—DISCUSSION.

MILL'S PROPOSITIONS AND INFERENCES OF MERE EXISTENCE.

By J. H. LEVY.

IN considering Mill's doctrine on this subject, it is best to commence with his statements respecting inductions of bare existence.¹ These alleged results of the inductive process may be considered the *summa genera* of such forms of predication; and it will be convenient to start from them and work downwards.

"With respect to general propositions of this class," says Mill, "that is, which affirm the bare fact of existence, they have a peculiarity which renders the logical treatment of them a very easy matter; they are generalisations which are sufficiently proved by a single instance. That ghosts, or unicorns, or sea-serpents exist, would be fully established if it could be ascertained positively that such things had been even once seen. Whatever has once happened is capable of happening again; the only question relates to the conditions under which it happens. So far, therefore, as relates to simple existence, the Inductive Logic has no knots to untie."

Now, I quite agree that "as relates to simple existence, the Inductive Logic has no knots to untie". But, where there are no knots naturally, we may, through that maladroitness in holding the threads of a complex investigation which is more or less an attribute of every human being, make a tangle; and that, in my opinion, has been done. It will always be to me a puzzle how a man of Mill's ability could so easily have reconciled himself to the notion that there is a whole class of generalisations each of which is (or may be) proved by a single instance. If this were true, instead of dismissing it with the remark that it affords Inductive Logic no knots to untie, I would say that it would be so extraordinary a phenomenon that, until it was adequately accounted for, the foundations of inference would remain a mystery.

I would first contend "with respect to *general* propositions of" existence, that they do not exist, or—to put the matter more clearly—that these alleged *general* propositions are not general at all. A general proposition is one actually or potentially in the form "Every x is y ". In propositions of existence, y = existent;

¹ *System of Logic*, vol. ii., pp. 143-4.

and a *general* proposition of existence is one which can be put in the form "Every x exists". But this is a meaningless formula. The universal quantification of the subject strips the predicate of existence of all significance. When we say "Every diamond is combustible," we mean that every diamond in this universe of ours has the attribute of combustibility. If we say "Every diamond exists," we mean that every diamond in the universe has the attribute of existence. But, if we mean this we mean nothing; for the proposition is as vapid a verbal one as ever had conferred on it transcendental honours.

When I say "Every x is y ," I mean that, within the limits of this universe, whenever and wherever x is found, y is found. When I say "Every x exists," the only legitimate sense which can be attached to the words is that, universally, whenever and wherever x is found, it exists. This is an identical proposition; and the fact that it is so disposes, once for all, of universal propositions of existence.

But, if there are no general propositions of existence, there are no inductions of existence, for the inductive process always results—potentially at least—in the proof of a general proposition. What, then, are the instances given by Mill? Beyond a doubt, they are particular propositions. "Sea-serpents exist" does not mean "Every sea-serpent exists," which is nonsense; but "Some sea-serpent exists". There is no mystery whatever, therefore, in the fact that a single instance establishes it. If I were to see a sea-serpent, I could not, from that fact alone, and without calling in the aid of biological knowledge outside of that special experience, infer the existence of other sea-serpents. What rational person would infer from the observation of a particular picture or building the existence of an indefinite number of similar pictures or buildings?

I now go one step further; and maintain that "Some sea-serpent exists" is not, except in mere form, a proposition of existence. It is identical in meaning with "Some serpent inhabits the sea," which is a proposition of co-existence, and means that the attributes connoted by the term serpent and that of inhabiting the sea are sometimes found together in the same thing. It makes no real difference that, instead of one of the attributes being put for a predicate, they are all put together in the subject. To say that a sea-serpent exists is to say that the various properties which make it up co-exist. All propositions, therefore, which are formally predicative of existence, but whose subject is analysable, or connotative of two or more attributes, are really propositions of co-existence.

All propositions may be thrown into the existential form. "Man is mortal" may be rendered "No immortal man exists"; and "Some swans are black" may be stated as "Some black swans exist".

Let us now see how far we have travelled. There are no

general propositions of existence. There are, consequently, no inductions of existence. The instances cited by Mill as general propositions of existence are not only not general propositions, but they are not propositions of existence. Indeed, the vast majority of propositions which pass as existential are not so except in mere verbal arrangement. What have we left? Propositions which are existential in form, and whose subject denotes a single attribute or none at all.

Let us now examine what is the real import of these. If we take first those which assert the existence of a single attribute, we find the process of elimination still forced on us. Suppose we say "Whiteness exists," or "Wisdom exists". Do we intend to assert that whiteness and wisdom are found as isolated phenomena? Assuredly not. We mean that they are *qualities* of some of the things we know, which is one way of saying that they co-exist with other qualities. If it were otherwise, we should not say that they exist; for we have no evidence of them apart from the things of which they are attributes. They are abstractions; and, as such, we need to be very careful in interpreting assertions of their existence. We never know clearly what a proposition is intended to assert till we see what is involved in its denial; and this is especially true of the class of propositions we are now considering. It would be very difficult even to guess what a person who denied the existence of pleasure was 'driving at,' if we had never come across the notion that pleasure is the mere negation or cessation of pain.

So again with propositions of which the subjects are non-connotative. If I say "Paris exists" to a man who does not know what is denoted by "Paris," the proposition conveys to him no meaning but the verbal one that something is called Paris. If, however, he *does* know what I intend to point out by "Paris," the proposition asserts for him the co-existence of the congeries of phenomena which go to make up the capital of France.

So far, then, we meet with no real proposition of existence, and, therefore, no inferences of existence. Last of all we come face to face with the assertion made by various great writers that out of the possible reach of our cognitive faculties there exists something whose irrelativity is expressed by such terms as the Absolute, Unconditioned or Unknowable. With this, as a philosophical doctrine, I am not here concerned. I refer to it solely in its connexion with the theory of predication. Mr. Herbert Spencer says of this Unknowable that "it is the abstract of *all* thoughts, ideas or conceptions. That which is common to them all, and cannot be got rid of, is what we predicate by the word existence."¹ The word existence is here defined so as to make it mean the Unknowable; but this empties the statement that the Unknowable exists of all meaning. If I understand Mr. Spencer's doctrine aright, it is that we have or may have, a *consciousness* of something

¹ *First Principles*, p. 95.

unconditioned, but not a *knowledge* of it. If so, I have nought to say with regard to this consciousness; for it cannot be stated in propositional form. When a proposition has for its subject the Absolute or Unknowable, it must be either meaningless or absurd; for the predicate must convey some information or none, and if the former, it stands in contradiction to the subject.

Propositions of mere existence, then, when they are not mere figments, are variant forms of other kinds of predication. Mill's defence of them against Professor Bain¹ really amounts to a surrender; for, according to it, the assertion of existence is only a disjunctive assertion of co-existence, sequence, or resemblance; and therefore has, on his own showing, no right to a separate place in the classification of the heads of predication.

IS THE DESIGN-ARGUMENT SCIENTIFIC?

By H. M. STANLEY.

By 'scientific' we understand—in accordance with the method and spirit of natural science. The scientific spirit is the ruling factor in present culture and the unique intellectual characteristic of this age. In past periods various elements of culture have ruled, but never before in the history of human progress has the scientific spirit achieved the ascendancy. In Hellas art and philosophy were ruling powers, and in Rome politics was dominant; but in both natural science played but an obscure part. In the Middle Ages the theological and religious spirit was the *Zeitgeist*; while to-day every department owes allegiance to science. Industry is plainly coming more and more under the rule of science, is losing its empiric character and becoming scientific. The realism and analytic character of recent art and literature proclaim the influence of science. Psychology, History and other like branches are being rapidly made scientific. Finally, perhaps the greatest intellectual conflict of this age is with respect to the question whether religion and theology can be validated in like manner. Whether science is to maintain this supremacy indefinitely is difficult to say.

Science interprets not the universe by man, but man by the universe. It goes outward, and seeks to regulate that which is within by what is discovered of that which is without. It disclaims all automorphism and anthropomorphism. Man is a part of the universe, and inevitably correlated with it. Let not man, says science, in his self-sufficiency lay down theories, philosophies, cosmogonies, theologies, out of his own consciousness; but let man know and obey nature, and thus attain power by obedience. It is useless for man to propitiate the gods he has.

¹ *System of Logic*, 8th ed., vol. i., pp. 112-113, note.