

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES.

Sir,—I send the following note to illustrate what seems to be a leading characteristic of Herbert Spencer's highly-gifted mind. While conversing with him I had frequent occasion to admire the easy precision with which he dealt in generalizations; there was neither vagueness nor change in the sense in which he used them. I concluded from this that observations from which those generalizations were deduced were habitually present to his mind in large number,

consciously or unconsciously, at the moment of speaking. A metaphor often occurred to me that exactly explains my meaning. A composite photograph based on only six portraits is sometimes well defined, but it is untrustworthy as a generalization. Another batch of six portraits of the same class of persons would give somewhat different results, and might give very different ones. So it is in the mind of an ordinary person. His generalizations may be clear, though based on only a few facts; but they change in character according to the details of the particular facts that happen to be temporarily in his thoughts. The meaning that he gives to the same abstract word on different occasions is consequently apt to vary, and his language and reasoning to fail in accuracy. But imagine a state of things in which 60, or 600, replaced the six mentioned above. By the laws of statistics the definition of the composite would be smoother in outline, and its trustworthiness as a generalization would be much enhanced, and so I think it was in the case of Herbert Spencer.

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