

THE ESSENCE OF RELIGION.

*To the Editor of BLACKFRIARS.*

SIR,

May I write a friendly protest against one sentence in Mr. Richards's article on William Cobbett in the April BLACKFRIARS? 'Cobbett,' he writes, 'like the majority of lay Englishmen in all ages, whether Catholic or Protestant, considered that *the essence of religion consisted in the corporal works of mercy.*' If Mr. Richards approves this opinion, one wonders whether he can have thought out its logic. If essential religion is the provision of *corporal* goods, a secularist, even positively atheist, philanthropist is a more *religious* man than any of the fathers of the desert; and the command to love our neighbour is not the second and subordinate, but the primary and principal law of God. In these days when, especially among the Socialists, a philanthropic humanism apes religion, claiming to be the purest and truest religion, Christians must be on their guard against concession unawares. 'Not by bread alone does man live . . . Thou shalt love the Lord thy God.' 'If I shall give all my substance to feed the poor and have not charity, I am nothing.' 'An instant of pure love is more precious in the eyes of God and more profitable to the Church than all other good works together though it may seem as if nothing were done' (St. John of the Cross).—Not, to be sure, the teaching of laymen, but authoritative notwithstanding.

Yours faithfully,

E. I. WATKIN.