THE VALUE OF THE METHOD OF PRAGMATISM IN THEOLOGY.

PRAGMATISM has gained a distinct place in recent philosophical speculation. The purpose of this article is to consider Pragmatism in Theology, and, as Pragmatism, we hope to show later, is a method rather than a philosophy, a truer title might be "The value of the Method of Pragmatism in Theology." In considering this at large we shall illustrate its value from two points of view; (1) historically or objectively by reference to the theology of Ritschl and Herrmann; (2) experientially or subjectively by reference to the popular antithesis of faith and reason—the former being the characteristic faculty of Christian experience.

What, then, in general is Pragmatism? Mr. Chesterton, in his collection of essays called "Heretics," says: "There are some people—and I am one of them—who think that the most important thing about a man is still his view of the universe." Now Pragmatism is essentially a philosophical point of view, viz., the attitude of value, of utility. Whatever exists influences our practice, and that influence alone, says the pragmatist, is its meaning for us. Philosophy's whole purpose—its "ratio essendi"—then is, to find out what practical difference it will make to you or to me whether this world-formula or that be the true one. If materialism has more value for our experience than idealism, if it will work better in experience, then it is a truer point of view. So Professor James—the most famous exponent of pragmatism—wrote: "Theories thus become instruments, not answers to enigmas in which we can rest." It is the attitude of looking away from first things, principles, categories, supposed necessities, and looking towards last things, fruits, consequences." Truth in our ideas, then, is not some hard

stagnant property inherent in them. It is not that hidden core of reality, that "thing-in-itself" which stands over against our ideas which *ex hypothesi* we can never know and so can never compare our ideas with. Truth in our ideas, means, according to the Pragmatist, their power to work, their value for an experience. "Truth happens to an idea; it becomes true; is made true by events." The Rationalist insists that truth is fixed; it is complete and ready made from all eternity; it is there once for all and has nothing to do with our practical interests or personal reasons. The Pragmatist insists rather that truth is made; "it is still in the making and awaits part of its complexion from the future."

There is much truth in this objection of Pragmatism to a hard, abstract, indifferent Rationalism. We have surely got beyond that shallow and airy optimism of too much religious philosophy, which, like the Stoic of old, is content to picture an ideal world where the pain and suffering of actual existing human beings have no real place. When crimes and tragedies are common around us, it is too patent a mockery to say with the Rationalists that "the negatives which haunt our ideals here below must be themselves negated in the absolutely real." It is these "negatives" which have an all too real existence here and now; and this "eternal peace abiding at the heart of endless agitation" has little meaning or value for the agitated, storm-tossed, wind-driven hearts of men. The truth is that this universe is a thing with scarred and broken edges, but Rationalism makes systems and systems must be perfectly closed. The adherent of Pragmatism, says, however, of his theory, "It can remain religious like the Rationalists, but, at the same time, like the Empiricists, it can preserve the richest intimacy with facts." "Pragmatism may be a happy harmoniser of Empiricist ways of thinking with the more religious

demands of human beings." To come closer to our subject, then, "if theological ideas prove to have a value for concrete life, they will be so far true for Pragmatism." "God is no better than matter as a principle, unless He promise more." "On pragmatistic principles, if the hypothesis of God works satisfactorily, in the widest sense of the word it is true. Now, whatever the residual difficulties may be, experience shows that it certainly does work; and that the problem is to build it out and determine it so that it will combine satisfactorily with all the other working truths." We begin to see now how Pragmatism connects itself closely with theology. If a materialistic view would promise us success, if it was bound by its internal laws to lead our world on and ever on, ever nearer to perfection, any rational man would worship her. But what Mr. A. J. Balfour says in his *Foundations of Belief* is too true. According to scientific materialism "The energies of our system will decay, the glory of the sun will be dimmed, and the earth, tideless and inert, will no longer tolerate the race which has for a moment disturbed its solitude. Man will go down into the pit and all his thoughts will perish. The uneasy consciousness, which in this obscure corner has for a brief space broken the contented silence of the universe, will be at rest. Matter will know itself no longer. "Imperishable monuments" and "immortal deeds," "death itself and love stronger than death, will be as if they had not been. Nor will anything that is be better or worse for all that the labour, genius, devotion and suffering of man have striven through countless ages to effect." But this final wreck and annihilation of the scientific materialist can be no anchor for the soul of man with his ideal aspirations and needs. The need of an eternal moral order is one of the deepest needs in man. The notion of God, then, on pragmatistic principles alone, has this practical superiority, that it guarantees an ideal order that shall

be permanently preserved; and so it responds to the deepest beat of the human heart. And the surest evidence and truest argument for God seems to us to lie in this inner personal experience. What has the deepest foundation in truth is what satisfies the deepest needs of actual human beings.

How, then, does this philosophy of Pragmatism connect itself with theology? It does so, it seems to us, because its *method* has unique value in theology. Christianity is an affair mostly of our own personal individual experience, and a Christian theology must primarily satisfy these religious needs. This is not the place to discuss, at length, Pragmatism as a final philosophy. We hope to bring out the inadequacy of Pragmatism, taken as final in theology, in the latter part of this article. All that we would note here is that the Pragmatists make their mistake when they transform this method into an ultimate philosophy. Even Professor James says somewhere, "It does not stand for any special results. *It is a method only.*" In dealing with sensations he says, "*That they are*, is undoubtedly beyond our control, but which we attend to, note, and make emphatic in our conclusions, depend on our own interests." That is where its truth as a *method* lies. But if we make it into a final explanation of things, then it becomes a mere form of Subjective Idealism. The Pragmatist, with the Rationalist, has to admit that "Reality is in general what truths have to take account of." The Pragmatist has to deal admittedly with a "situation" which is "given" and not "made," and this is the type of all objectivity. If it would be well with him there must be certain facts "given," and this is a reality independent of human thought or will. "Originality in philosophy is difficult of attainment," and the Pragmatist no more than the Rationalist can construct a universe out of his own head. But it is just here we see how

the method of Pragmatism is of such vital importance in *theology as such.* Here the *fact of Christ* is "given" once for all. We are always moving within the Fact, and here the Pragmatic method is all-essential, grounded as it is on the basis of Fact. Christian theology must circle round not the creation, but *Christ the Saviour*, and it must concern itself only with the speculative ideas which Christ as Saviour involves. It should never be forgotten that the main purpose—*the* purpose indeed—of Christianity, was *practical*, and that in theology, which ought to be an intellectual expression of Christianity, this practical character must be kept in the forefront. Professor Orr seems to us slightly in error when he says, "The theology which is raised on the basis of man's moral self-consciousness is a speculative construction as truly as that which proceeds from the ideas of existence and cause"; for, obviously, the former is much more closely related to our real interests and *needs.*

Theology, like the Christianity whose expression it is, must be connected with life rather than with ideas, with practical needs, interests and aspirations. This truth, then, is strongly emphasised when we examine in more detail how the method of Pragmatism may be illustrated historically in Ritschl and Herrmann, and experientially in the popular antithesis of Faith and Reason. For if Origen "platonised" the Gospels, we might say that Ritschl "pragmatised" them. Whenever we find men insisting upon the value of experience or conviction in theology they are influenced directly or indirectly by the writings of Ritschl and Herrmann, and, all unconsciously to themselves, perhaps, their viewpoint is identical with the method of Pragmatism.

It is important to note, then, that the Ritschlian school are agreed upon these two important points: (1) in their claim for the complete independence of theology from all

metaphysical tendencies (and by this they mean abstract speculations), and their consequent attempt to set Christian faith beyond the reach of criticism; (2) in their view that theology is thus *wholly practical*. Most of the readers of this magazine are doubtless familiar with Ritschl's division of judgments into two classes, (*a*) Theoretical judgments which predicate certain things of an object considered in its own nature, (*b*) Value-judgments in which its worth and value for the self is affirmed. Thus that "Jesus Christ died upon the Cross" is a judgment of fact upon which pure historical evidence must decide; "that we have redemption through His blood" is one of value, of personal feeling and conviction. Now the Ritschlian school of theologians would hold that theology ought to contain nothing but such statements of appreciation issuing with sincere conviction from the living faith of a Christian soul. This conception, then, of value-judgments plays the crucial part in their theology. So even "Christ has only the value of God for us" simply because theology, thus viewed, is not the science of God in Himself, but the knowledge of God as He affects us through Christ, or of our own mental states as thus affected. Ritschl would thus obtain a practical theology free from metaphysical speculations. The impressions produced are ultimate for us; "of Being, Essence and Substance we can know nothing." Hence all questions pertaining to the nature and substance of God are ruled out as irrelevant; and, so he removes at one bold stroke the great mass of past discussions. All theology which transcends his estimate of value is rejected, and large blocks of the old theology are thus cast into the lumber-room of the past. For the deep things of Christianity are offered to practical faith; and not to the hard static understanding. From all abstract questions we must turn away, as Herrmann says, "with hearts cold as ice." In his treatment of the Deity of Christ,

for example, Ritschl is as keen as any other to affirm it, but it means for him not a scientific proposition of cognition, but a judgment of value. "Hoc est Christum cognoscere, beneficia ejus cognoscere." This surely we may call the watchword of Pragmatism in theology. His Godhead consists in His subjective appeal to our minds, in the services He renders us, the benefits He bestows upon us, and the saving work He establishes in our souls. Such speculative questions as an ontological Trinity, or the κενῶσις of the Divine λόγος are, according to him, "pure mythology." From the Divine character of the work Jesus Christ achieved on earth and from that alone he argues to the Divine character of His Person; for He produces upon us the impression of an infinite spiritual value. To reach the "*worth*" of Christ, he starts from the "*work*" of Christ, and arrives in the end at the conclusion that He is one who has for us the religious value of God. Herrmann's method is the same. Spiritual truth can only be spiritually discerned. A true knowledge of Christ and of the Christian facts is only possible to him whose experience can appreciate them. Their certainty lies in their attesting themselves in conscience and in our inner experience as indubitable facts. They "*find*" us at the roots of our being, and we submit to their influence. So, says Herrmann, "It is not possible to prove to an unbeliever the truth of these things." "Should an opponent appear now with the objection that we are resolving Christianity into the subjective, we can only suppose that for him Christ is not objective." "We begin to be Christians when we find the footprints of God in our life in the fact that the Person of Jesus has come our way." When we thus come to see, with Herrmann, that religious faith is not a thing concerned with the establishment of eternal truths, but rather with the appeal of the great Christian facts to our religious needs, we no longer think of gaining the cer-

tainty of faith in any other way. "Some day," says Herrmann, "this emancipating knowledge will dawn on others also; meanwhile we rejoice in the thought of the joy which awaits them when God shall give them the strength to throw aside the monkish cowl of the scholastic theology."

Now it seems to us obvious that Ritschl and Herrmann emphasise here the true method in theology, what we have called the method of Pragmatism. Religious knowledge must be the knowledge of a religious man, for whom the Christian facts have an infinite value. It is never the abstract frigid inference of an impassive spectator who would coldly dissect the body of Christian truth. It is based upon the warmth of the impression which the historical Christ has made upon our experience.

It is this which makes the pragmatic method in theology (as employed by Ritschl and Herrmann) of so vast importance. We have here the *given fact* of the *historical Christ*. He is a fact. He is *there*. The question for us is His worth for *our* experience. In philosophy, Pragmatism has no such given fact. It is because, in theology, they are working within this fact of Christ that the theological method of Ritschl and Herrmann has been so productive of results. Their anti-scholastic spirit, their protest against the influence of an abstract metaphysic in Christian theology, is a deep truth. We have more to do in religion than worry our heads over mere speculations in which cunning brains use the Christian facts as mere dialectical squibs or fireworks to amuse their mental sublety. It is all too easy to thus lose oneself in smoke. Herrmann and Ritschl did well to emphasise the great spiritual and ethical truths which are essential to a correct Christian theology. For it has too often to be deplored in the past that even theologians seemed to delight in getting away from all real religious experience, and in picturing a God whose validity and worth

seem in direct proportion to His diversity from what we know of Him in the Christ of history. Under the guidance of their fine intellects they have too often made balloonist expeditions into the ether, but have never failed to lose themselves on the way. A tight hold of the rope of Christian experience would have saved them and alone can save us from such fruitless excursions into thin air. If we viewed life not from the religious standpoint, but as impartial spectators viewing a game of chance with no stake in the result, the above expeditions might be intelligible; but for the religious mind such is an impossible *attitude*. It is the practical value of the great fact of Christ as Saviour for our experience that must be the centre of true Christian theology. With Herrmann we must emphasise the essential truth that religion is not mere dogma, but actual life, and salvation does not depend upon a speculative opinion but upon an *active will*.

The value of this method of Pragmatism in theology, which we have illustrated historically in Ritschl and Herrmann, is further emphasised in the popular antithesis of faith and reason in our religious experience. Science, whose organ is reason, treats of the demonstrable, the universal, the material; whereas religion, whose organ is faith, deals essentially with the spiritual, the individual, the undemonstrable. This antithesis is founded, as has been indicated, upon the uniqueness of the Christian facts, which have value only for the really spiritual man. This has too often been misunderstood. It has led to the deification of mere faith as the enemy of reason. Again, reason being thought of as incapable of dealing with the highest interests of man's spiritual life, has led some to maintain the cause of religion on the basis of philosophical scepticism; while others, viewing faith as entirely opposed to reason rather than as another aspect of experience, infer that the problem is insolu-

ble by any method of science, and so conclude that the only rational method is *Agnosticism*—that unknown God of superficiality.

But the truth is that faith is much more than an assent to mere historical statements. It is in reality a deeper reason, for it enters a region where reason as such cannot dwell. It is an immediate consciousness of God, a grasping of His value for our religious needs. It is an experience which reason always seeks to grasp, but which fades "forever and forever" from its view. It needs a certain condition of the heart and even of the will to see even the truth of the Godhead of Christ and to appreciate the value of the Christian facts. "The natural man discerneth not the things of the spirit." The scientific type of mind is apt to look down upon the Christian viewpoint, because it seems to them unscientific. But faith is the peculiar type of Christian experience, and its secrets are known only to those who have faith. It is the worth of an experience, its value that counts for the Christian, and this only the Christian can experience. And the worth of the experience can have no value for him who has it not.

After this somewhat diffuse investigation, what are we to say of the true relation of Pragmatism and Theology? Is Pragmatism a final theology or is it not? In a sense it is, in another most obviously not. The *method of Pragmatism* seems to us final; but to make it into a final theology is as *obviously* false. Ritschl, as has been shown, introduced a real method into theology, but he did not present an ultimate theology, because he made the fatal mistake of transforming a mere method into a theology as such. For if Ritschl and his school were entirely consistent, they would be to theology what Hume was to philosophy, and that because they would reduce it *entirely* to mere subjective particularism and emotional feeling. "By his insistence

upon the *operations* of an object he ignores the fact that it exists," says a critic of the system ; and such is the root-objection to Pragmatism taken as final. Theology can never thus become a mere Pragmatism or emotionalism, any more than a mere intellectualism. There can be an apotheosis of Reason and also of Will, and neither is the worship of the *true God.*

Professor Orr criticises Ritschl somewhat unfairly when he says of the system that in it " it is not objective truth we have to deal with in religion, but conceptions in the form adapted to satisfy our religious needs." Ritschl holds such truth to be as objective as any other ; and, if they satisfy our religious needs, it is the best criterion of their true *objectivity.* But Ritschl did err in confining Christian theology entirely to the practical motives. It is a mere concession to a false view of science to rule out altogether the rational element. We must found an ultimate Christian theology on the whole nature of man, emotional, volitional and rational. It is a mistake to separate wholly value-judgments and theoretic ; for to do so may be interpreted as an attempt to ground religious certainty on indifference to reason, if not on scepticism ; and all such foundations are of sand, for the underlying basis is the false assumption that whatever belongs to the sphere of religious faith cannot belong to the sphere of *assured fact.* The root fact, as has been seen, on which the extreme is based, is merely that the apprehension of religious truth is conditioned in a way in which the apprehension of other truths (e.g., the truths of physical science) is not. For the prime fact in religion is that they satisfy our religious *needs,* and, surely, of all certainties, this is the surest.

It is the great merit of Herrmann and Ritschl, then, that they have tried, and tried not in vain, to free Christian theology from the deadening weight of an abstract theology,

and they do so by emphasising the true method in theology —what we have called the method of Pragmatism. But it is one of their greatest defects that they have failed to recognise the need of at least an attempted Christian metaphysic, which will try to think things together and to think them out. It is a well-known historical fact that, at a time when the grandest empire of the ancient world was fighting for its very existence against rude barbarians on every frontier, the very sailors and fishermen on the quays and wharves of Alexandria fought and disputed over the eternal generation of the Son. And so will it be to the end of time. The Christ of history and of experience will ever be a figure to stimulate the hardest thought and will always transcend man's expression thereof, for, in the last analysis, He is God. And so a Christian theology, which must centre round this Figure, has as its ideal a final philosophy of the universe.

A theology, centring round the worth of Christ and the great Christian facts, must emphasise as vital the pragmatic method—the value of these facts in Christian experience—and here Ritschl and Herrmann are all-important. However, it must go beyond this and attempt to put forward a general view of the world, because, for the Christian, Christian theology becomes a final philosophy. Fortunately, we are not called upon here to enter upon this difficult region, and we would simply note the fact. Thus we have the endless progression of Christian truth, the ultimate theology being a *terminus ad quem* never a *terminus a quo*.

What, then, is the conclusion resulting from the above as to the value of the pragmatic method in theology ?

Faith and Reason, Knowledge and Will *would* become *one*. They stretch out ideal hands to clasp one another. Will they meet ? Never, on this earth. Hence the permanent place of the pragmatic attitude in our finite experience.

The value-judgment remains fundamental in religious truth. Theology must ever retain this element of mystery and requires faith, "the evidence of things not seen." It is not given to us in this mortal coil "to know even as we are known." In our finite experience we must accept the basal method of Pragmatism; we must have the faith, the trust that "all things work together for good to them that love God." That "only those who do the will shall know of the doctrine."

Reason craves perfect knowledge, completed insight; but such is forever impossible in theology, for the very nature of the subject-matter destroys the *Ideal.* The value-experience of the Pragmatist remains, then, ultimate for us. Our insight can never be on this earth the insight of the Intellectualist—complete knowledge, systematic perfection. Many Rationalists talk as if they were in the happy position of having no difficulties, as if the world contained no dark mysteries. But the science of God does not manifest itself thus simply. Reason has here to be supplemented by faith, which flows no doubt from reason, but yet is forever beyond it. God—the supreme object of theology—is *known* yet *unknown*—known in the pragmatic sense for the ends of our moral and religious life; unknown because incapable of complete intellectual apprehension, "the one signal example of how human knowledge may be real while the reality that is known passes out of knowledge." Faith, then, is man's highest form of reason. The value for an experience of such a final faith can be dispensed with only in the "omniscience which leaves no room for mystery or for incomplete knowledge." Faith, trust, authority—these are the final categories for us. We submit to the authority of the value-estimate of Pragmatism, the value of our spiritual experience. This final faith may be an implicit knowledge, but it is *our* human equivalent for

omniscience. The method of Pragmatism is here *final*. The power at the root of all science, of all morality, of all religion cannot obviously be itself scientifically deduced. Our truest and deepest truth here is a final faith in God as revealed in the value of Christ for our religious experience.

One day we shall know even as we are known. Then the method of Pragmatism in theology, which is final for our finite experience, will be transcended in something higher. Faith and reason shall have joined hands at last. Those who have done the will shall *know* the doctrine. Faith and reason shall together he swallowed up in real insight, in perfect communion, in living fellowship; and in that final experience we may hope the value-judgment shall be forever equated with the theoretic.

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