

ARTICLE V.

CHRISTIANITY AND IDEALISM.

BY THE REV. JAMES LINDSAY, M.A., B.D., B.SC.

It has always been to us one of the crowning glories of Christianity that it not merely has close affinities with, but is itself such a living spring, of true idealism. It is itself, however, never mere idealism. It sees too much reality at the core of the universe for that. But such reality is spiritual, and provides the real-ideal, which is the true ideal. Any other idealism is simply inane. We believe a true Idealism to be the true philosophy: we hold the Ideal to be the Real, and Reality to be the test of the Ideal; but we do not take every Ideal to be the true and full Real. It may very well be doubted whether more subtle and subversive influences for Christianity have ever gone forth from any philosophy than have issued from some modern forms of Idealism. The adjective "Absolute" prefixed to an "Idealism" nowise perfects its view of the Real, which it makes equivalent to the Ideal, while the Ideal has been neither seen nor summed by it. Both Jowett and Caird have told us that the Christ whom we know is "necessarily ideal": so he is—our conscious and Highest Ideal; but it is another thing to imply that this Ideal which we have of the Christ is something wrenched from the actual, attained indeed by our own improvings upon the Christ historic and actual. If Christ be not the Ideal because he, as actual, is always more than our own highest Ideal of him, then he should soon cease to inspire us with strenuous effort to realize the ideal that he brings.

But he is the Ideal realized. He is God manifest in the flesh, in whom the Ideal is made everlastingly real. He is the Ideal for mankind to-day, just because these things are so, and because he is Actuality, not mere offspring of our idealizings. It is thus evident that the Ideal is for us the basal reality just because the Ideal is for us more than something merely subjective. The fundamentally real of the Universe is for us just that archetypal ideal which had its home in the mind of God. The physically real is but the manifestation of the spiritually ideal. The eternal principles and laws of reason whereby the ideal so passes into the real are all grounded in God, so that it is in his "light we see light." The Ideal is seen to be as rational as its realization is seen to be progressive. Just because the realization is progressive, the ideal is realized in the real, imperfect though the realization be. Incompleteness may be part of the case, but the incompleteness is itself an inspiration, calling forth our free agency and effort towards fuller approximation of the ideal.

Still, rational as our conceptions of the Ideal may be, they may yet be no more than subjective and illusive, if so be they are not theistically grounded in God as the Absolute Reason. May we not say that such realism as this implies is a realism that is, in fact, ideal? We do well to remember that even the world of real things is not a world of mere things, but of things that are to us an expression of the Ideal Mind. But that does not mean an Hegelian mode of treating the world as, in Schopenhauer's phrase, a "crystallized syllogism," as though Logic were originative of nature, not merely interpretative of it. The "Absolute Idea" of Hegel is powerless to create the world of actuality, for, "without matter," as Kant said, "categories are empty." And the "Absolute Idea" in its self-evolution is of all things most inane, because it figures as thought—"the impersonal life of thought"—without a

Thinker. It is a philosophic feat to find things to subsist without substance and originate without cause. The search of Neo-Hegelianism for a principle of unity, and its sympathy with evolutionary conception, have made this form of idealism very potent and attractive in the hands of great teachers like Green and Caird. Professor John Watson, of Canada, has lately furnished, in his book on "Christianity and Idealism," further illustration of what we are to understand by, and expect from, idealistic Christianity. Professor Watson is so bent on basing morality on religion, that he falls into the mistake of confounding their actual or historic relations with their necessary or logical connection. His treatment of their relation is not conspicuous for clearness, if so be he means not to commit the mistake of making morality unjustifiably *dependent* upon religion. "There can be no morality without the belief in a life higher than sense and passion." Again he says, "This belief must draw its support from faith in a divine principle which insures victory to the higher life." Now it is an untenable position to assume that there can be "no" morality—that a man can give "no" response to the demands made upon conscience—without such "belief" in higher "life" and such "faith" in "Divine principle." Man is surely sufficiently an end, and this present existence surely sufficiently valuable, to make a right will a possible (in the moral sense) and an important thing. It is surely unfair to assume that there can be "no" moral or virtuous conduct without the explicit "faith" he imposes. Have they who so speak understood how thoroughly woven ethical law is with the whole tissue of our being? As if morality could not be practiced without such "faith" in the grounds of it! Is not the Professor's idealistic content to run back into an ultimate category of moral obligation? Do we not in such obligation come into sight of the ideal? Is not man's own ideal yet one with the pur-

pose of God for man? For us it is enough, even in the theistic interest, to hold to such obligation, since the ideal therein perceived and sought binds itself upon us as being of God in its origin, and as being identical with the Divine purpose for us. We can postulate a deeper basis for morality than religious dogmas, without in the least accepting the views as to religion of writers like Leslie Stephen and some who stand for the independence of morality. It is possible for the religious mind to be here too religious! So hard is it to rise above traditionalism.

The same tendency is found in Professor Watson's treatment of the Greek ideal. He gives an excellent account of Greek religion, and then says, "To this religious ideal corresponds the ethical ideal." But there are those who have made a not less deep study of the subject than there is any reason to suppose Professor Watson has done, who yet find that the Greek held to the sufficiency of natural morality, and was irreligious in characteristic—realized, in fact, to be so by his own most thoughtful representatives. The truth is that, in describing the Greek religion as he idealistically does, Professor Watson is whetting an argument against himself. For it amounts to a testimony to the strength of the moralization of the human consciousness, that the moral consciousness went before with such idealizing and purifying effect for the religion, as it must have done when the gods were "humanized." Professor Watson wisely refrains from telling us whether skepticism would have had the power it did have in the hands of the Sophists but for the way in which the moral sense was critically brought to bear on the traditional beliefs of Greece.

When the Professor deals with the Jewish ideal in relation to that which is Christian, his shortcoming is very manifest. He actually misplaces the stress which should have been laid on prophetism, so that it rests rather on the

law. An idealistic philosopher should not be slow to enter into the ideal world of the prophets, and as much of modern theology should be absorbed by any one who presumes to lead thought on such matters as to prevent emphasis doing duty for insight. The significance of propheticism—its incomparable greatness and its unique character—Professor Watson has not realized.

A strange treatment, too, of the Christian ideal is that which is conducted without regard to the Incarnation, in which, for many of us who are also idealists but after another fashion, the ideal became real. Here, in the Infinite Moral Person, is actualized all that prophetic ideal had seemed to portend. An impact is thus given to the argument for the genetic relation of the Jewish and Christian ideals such as is completely wanting to the work of Professor Watson. But what are we to think of a Christianity in which that which is most characteristic—the Incarnation—is ignored, and in which a mere circle of ideas takes the place of a Divine Person?

We have, of course, been already made familiar by idealistic writers with the retention of spiritual idea in the case of Christ's Resurrection and the dismissal of historic fact. Professor Watson supplies a similar projection of ideas without any basework in the historic fact of the Incarnation. Or, is the Incarnation to be reckoned among the "foreign and outworn integuments," and not as the "vital substance" of that "historical theology," a "large part" of whose "essence," we have been blandly informed, "will fall away" under the *rapprochement* between Christianity and Idealism? But even when Christ became incarnated in one of his apostles who said, "Christ liveth in me," does any one imagine that it was as anything "foreign" to the human life of that follower that the Divine life of Jesus was so present in it? What we have here is that "outworn" Hegelian type of thought in which is no tossing

betwixt idea and history, for all history *is* idea for its mediating thought. But what guarantee is there for the continuance of spiritual idea or essence when it is no longer wedded to actual or historic fact?

Is not this procedure but one move to those already numerous forms of abstractness and unreality from which philosophy has been seeking deliverance or recovery? Does this divorce place the idea on any surer basis in causing it to lead a sundered life? Does it not reduce it at length to a state of impotence? When we witness this substitution of ideas for the concrete actualities of the Christian faith, we recall the deeper wisdom of even a modern novelist whose insight pointed out how often "ideas" are "poor ghosts," so insufficient are they to prove a vitalizing motive and force for mankind. If orthodox theology may be blamed for its too frequent methods of accretion, does it not seem that idealistic Christianity is no less blameworthy for its methods of abstraction?

Professor Watson blames Mr. Balfour for retaining a "matter" of sense after rejecting the Kantian "thing in itself." This matter is to fill up the categories which else were formal and empty, in Mr. Balfour's view. Professor Watson subjects Kant's positions on the opposition of subject and object to criticism, and recalls the *real* object as existing, for Kant, apart from the subject, but the *known* object not so existent. Kant, of course, held the spatial and temporal forms to be due to the subject, while the "matter" so related he held to be due to the object. In this contrast of matter and form, an independent existence of subject and object was assumed. But then, Professor Watson contends, we have no right to assume this "independent existence of subject and object, unless we can show that an independent subject and object can be known." We must be sure that the separation of subject and object is "admissible" before we ask what is contrib-

uted by the one and what by the other. We must see whether this separation will explain knowledge for us. For we already have knowledge when we try to explain knowledge.

So far as knowledge goes, the object exists but for a conscious subject—its necessary correlate, while the subject, on the other hand, is “absorbed” in the object. So at least Professor Watson puts it, although it may be said, in passing, that some other idealistic philosophers have lately done better, discriminating the unattained ideal of knowledge, in virtue of which, knowledge can manifestly never be the full expression of reality. But what becomes of the independent existence of subject and object when each, in knowledge, depends so completely on the other? Professor Watson insists on the untenableness of Kant’s position, and shows that space and time relations have no right to be retained for the subject alone, but only in so far as there has arisen for it the “consciousness of an object determinable under those relations.” The object may be more or less determinate, but is always a known object, never a “thing in itself.” The object always exists for a subject, any other object being fictional and abstract. So Professor Watson concludes that there is no opposition between a “matter” which comes from the object and a “form” contributed by the subject. The world exists solely for a combining, self-active subject.

Now, Professor Watson presumably, like a good idealistic philosopher, wishes us to understand the futility of inquiry into the epistemological process, and we have been well accustomed to this mode of insistence from other idealistic philosophers. Subject and object, form and matter, exist only in such dependence on each other, that we are left by idealistic philosophers to suppose inquiry into their coming together to be useless and vain. So identified are thought and reality in their view, that they would

have all men become metaphysicians, none epistemologists. But surely modern researches into the nature and possibility of real knowledge, with the confusions and uncritical assumptions of knowledge, make this idealistic insistence a belated one. It is, of course, inevitable that this epistemological inquiry, like every other, must be made by mind itself. It is a strange and unmeaning prejudice which objects to theoretic scrutiny of the cognitive faculty, because therein—as in all science—we are using this faculty itself. It is simply irrational to reject the science because we cannot have it on other terms. Shall we, then, accept the Hegelian identity of thought and existence? That we cannot do, for this identification has been, since the days of Trendelenburg, too utterly discredited. But neither are we concerned to contend for Mr. Balfour's "matter," for which it has been claimed that Professor Watson has conclusively disposed of it along with the Kantian "thing in itself."

We are, however, prepared to go so far in Mr. Balfour's direction as to be quite unconvinced by Professor Watson's idealism that *extra-mental* reality is not guaranteed in knowledge. That *extra-mental* reality is so guaranteed is what is of interest to us here; *what* that reality is may be left aside at present. With what Professor Watson says of the self-activity of the subject we entirely agree, but this activity nowise impairs the fact that the object, when given, wakes a conviction of *extra-mental* reality. Our knowledge implicates existence or reality beyond knowledge itself as a process. The cognitive subject cannot fail to recognize that that of which he has knowledge exists without him, and cannot possibly be one with his own mental state. It is the transcendent Real which is thus implicate in his knowledge. And it may very well be that there are, what Mr. Balfour terms "irreducible" elements in such objective cognition. If Mr. Balfour be held not to

have satisfactorily disposed of these for us, his critic, Professor Watson, has, in his smooth process, still less done so, for he has not even felt troubled by their existence. The truth is, Professor Watson has erected for himself an idealistic watch-tower, with the stout determination that, beyond the circle of its mind-swept horizon, no reality shall exist, any such reality being by him practically treated as "fiction."

As to the other point, Professor Watson claims to speak for those whose affirmation is "that the world exists only for thought." Does it therefore exist only *in* thought? Does not knowledge or thought guarantee to us reality which is *extra-mental*? Is not this of the essence of cognition? Is not thought so completed beyond thought? Professor Watson admits that there may be "real elements which thought cannot reduce to unity," and says "it is not maintained that there is no reality which is not thought by us," but why then inveigh against Mr. Balfour for having spoken of the "fiction (?) of an irreducible" or "refractory" element? Of course, all is smooth within thought itself, but it does not seem to us a deeper philosophical procedure for thought to advance on its easy and untroubled way than to ponder, as does Mr. Balfour, the problem of reality so unreduced. Professor Watson dogmatically calls such reality "pure abstraction" and "metaphysical abstraction," and affirms without warrant that it has "no content." How does he know? He affirms it to be *out* of his thought, and how can he *know* it so as to posit for it "no content"?

Again, we, for our part, are often enough in deep and radical disagreement with Dr. Bradley's philosophy, but we confess to be here in cordial agreement with much that Dr. Bradley urges, and Professor Watson ineffectively criticizes. Professor Watson admits "that, if we suppose the real to be something which exists apart from thought," we

must separate or divide the "what" from the "that." But what Dr. Bradley rightly supposes, as to reality being existent beyond thought, shall be seen in his own words: "I do not deny that reality *is* an object of thought; I deny that it is barely and *merely* so" (p. 169). And "there is an erroneous idea that, if reality is more than thought, thought itself is, at least, quite unable to say so. To assert the existence of anything in any sense beyond thought suggests, to some minds, the doctrine of the thing-in-itself" (p. 167). Yet again, Dr. Bradley says that to conclude from any single aspect—such as thinking, in which "we can imagine" that "we find all reality"—that "in the universe there is nothing beyond this single aspect, seems quite irrational" (p. 175). Once more, he tells us that the universe never can be known "in such a sense that knowledge would be the same as experience or reality" (p. 545). Reality which "cannot be thought" may be reality to which Professor Watson is unable "to attach any meaning," as having "no community with thought reality," but we have seen that the "that" of such reality is clearly to be maintained. And this "that" is so far from being "merely the abstraction of reality" that it is real enough to upset the lop-sided idealism which Professor Watson has sought to establish.

Again, the reality which is thought is the absolute, according to Professor Watson, and to seek the absolute "beyond the thought reality" is to "seek the living among the dead"; for "if the absolute is not revealed to us in the reality that we know, it is for us nothing." Now, the Absolute is certainly not something unrelated, else it could not be known, and there is no way of reaching reality save as implicated in knowledge. But, because the Absolute is revealed to us in the "reality that we know," shall we therefore postulate no more Absolute than that which is known or thought by us? Is such further Absolute for

us "nothing"? If so, verily an impoverished and uninspiring Absolute is ours. But the Absolute is never so comprehended by our thought as Professor Watson represents: there is, in our knowledge of reality, always such a periphery of indefiniteness as leaves an infinite progress possible to us. Positive and real is our knowledge of the Absolute Being, but to treat all existence of the Absolute, beyond what has been "thought" by us, as non-existent, is simply absurd.

Professor Watson claims for his idealistic representations that they are in "essential" harmony "with the Christian ideal of life," however differing from popular theology. A more adequate statement of them would show how far this claim is correct. The "only purely Christian idea" contended for by the Professor in redemptive matters is "that it is the very nature of God to communicate himself to finite beings; that, loving his creatures with an infinite love, he can realize his own blessedness only in them." Yes; but it ought not to be forgotten that the egoistic perfection of Deity is quite capable of realizing love's infinite ideal in itself, and should not be so placed in dependence on finite objects. This tendency to an excessive ethical necessitation in God is only too prevalent, so that the eternally independent and all-sufficing existence of Deity becomes unwarrantably obscured. We have no right thus to ground the communicative or creative acts of Deity in his nature rather than in his self-conscious volition. For the Absolute Personality we postulate a Being for Self that is quite independent of anything that might be for it a not-self, and the need for keeping this in mind we shall presently see.

In dealing with the Absolute, Professor Watson rightly opposes the tendency to make the Absolute something higher than personality or a self-conscious subject, as being needlessly resorted to in order to avoid limitation,

while "the subject comprehends all reality." But the Professor's treatment of the Absolute as Personality is marked by the defects of the idealistic school, and his representations seem to us here less happy or philosophically correct than usual. There is the usual emphasis on the "main idea" of the Absolute as self-conscious, and the usual absence of qualities of volitional or ethical character in favor of the reflective element. The self-activity which personality emphasizes is the property of spirit, and the self-consciousness, on which the idealists lay stress, is only part of a self-determination which includes thought, self-consciousness, and moral self-determination. The manifestations of Deity are so grounded in self-determination or freedom as to presuppose the personality of God, whose self-consciousness is but condition and presupposition of the moral self-determination of which we have spoken.

"Evil," says Professor Watson, "is not an accident; it is inseparable from the process by which man transcends his immediate life." He informs us that "sin is not crime," is "not a violation of rights," and "God is not a Judge." In the course of the Professor's idealizations, we are informed that "sin requires no external punishment to bring it home to the sinner: it brings its own punishment with it in the destruction of the higher life." Man is "saved from sin only as he realizes in his own life the self-communicating Spirit of God." Concerning which utterances it is to be said that this mode of treating sin does not seem very deep or thorough. It is so fearful of anything external that it never gets clear of the meshes of subjectivity in which it is idealistically involved. It is marked by a manifest lack of grasp on the fact that man, though a self-active being, is a responsible agent. No consciousness is more deeply implanted within him than the knowledge that he is so. Professor Watson's bugbear of externality would vanish, were it only remembered that the commu-

nications of God's mind and will are made *in*, and not merely *to*, the rational and religious consciousness of man. But are we to suppose that, because God so reveals himself *in* us, we are no more responsible *to* him, and he is no more Judge *over* us? However we may claim for human souls a kinship with the Divine, we surely need more careful handling, ere we seem to dispense with the "Oversoul," and to obliterate those relations which, wherever the sense of sin, guilt, and moral responsibility is realized, assume this character of what we may call *overness*.

Again, we roundly deny the legitimacy of identifying moral evil with that necessary development wherein man progresses from the natural and mechanical towards the spiritual, free, and rational. Sin, as transgression of the known law of God, is positive or willful aberration from this norm. Is such positive aberration the necessity which Professor Watson makes of sin? Nothing but a defective hold on Personality—alike on its Divine and human sides—could make us content with these idealistic representations of sin, whereby it appears lacking in those elements of revolt, disobedience, or rebellion, which have justly been regarded as belonging to its "essential" character as wrought under the government of God. No doubt, Professor Watson allows himself to speak of sin as "a desecration of the ideal nature of the sinner," as a "willing of himself as in his essence he is not." But, for aught he says, he is quite innocent of the real havoc wrought of sin—an idealistic haze prevents his seeing the cleft or chasm it has made betwixt man and God. In fact, this latter and more positive view of sin is quite different from the theory of imperfection already put forward, and betrays a manifest lack of self-consistency, this view not being in keeping with his own system.

Here, then, in things theological, as too often in things philosophical, the idealistic mode of solution is too easy to

be satisfactory. It strangely ignores the pre-conditions of the inner or ideal development it so much desiderates. Should it not be easy to see how the consciousness of guilt springs up within us in our willful estrangement, and will continue to spring up amid our failures to the end, and how, therefore, some deep and thorough way must be found of purging this guilt? But that thoroughness is precisely what idealistic representations have never shown. Not enough is it that sin be branded as a coming short of the ideal, or of blessedness, or as a mistake from man's own side: it is, so long as God is God—so long as we do not attenuate the Divine Personality so that it becomes but the pale semblance of that which we claim for ourselves—so long must we refuse to think only of the inner and subjective conditions of sin, and not also of its outer and objective relations to the God with whom we have to do. Religion "entirely fails of its end," says Professor Watson, "unless it transforms and spiritualizes" man. Granted; but man, Professor Watson himself being witness, "transcends his immediate life," and, in so doing, is brought into relations that must be viewed as external to him. Why should it be so hard for idealistic writers to see that, without speaking of change in his character or nature, we may yet very properly think and speak of change in God's relation or attitude to our sin, as we relate ourselves to Jesus Christ?

This postulation by idealistic writers of a mere change of mind in ourselves (*Verhalten*), without due regard to a change of relation (*Verhältniss*), comes of the metaphysical presupposition—surely not a very enlightened one—that change in the attitude or relation of Deity to man is a thing not to be thought of. If Professor Watson had been as good a theologian as he is a philosopher, he would have known that theology has no falser idea than just this presupposition of the impassibility of God. Man can be

“saved from sin,” he tells us, “only as he realizes in his own life the self-communicating Spirit of God,” but the pre-conditioning elements of this realization are strangely unreal to his apprehension. Does he not know that the unequivocal testimony alike of our own conscience and of Jesus Christ is that the Divine displeasure in respect of sin can be dismissed as a figure of speech only by our casting aside the Personality of God? It is sheer illogicality to deny any Godward purpose to the sacrifice of Christ. The saving from sin for which idealists contend may be real, though springing from subjective process; but it wears an unhappy resemblance to forgiving our own sins. In the Christianity of the historic Christ, God still testifies to the sinner, in the forgiving act, that the consequences of his sin have been abolished, and that the relation of personal communion with God is one which now stands free and open. And while it may be true that “the spiritual life cannot be imparted from without,” yet that life depends far too implicitly, for its quickening and developing influences, on that which is “without” for the idealistic representation to be adequate.

“The church,” says Professor Watson, “has tended to limit Christianity to the direct promotion of the moral ideal” to the exclusion of intellectual, social, scientific, and artistic elements pertaining to the perfect development of humanity. This is too true. But is it possible to take the claim of idealistic Christianity to remedy this defect with becoming gravity? Is our Christianity of to-day in such hopeless case? But it will be completed by this idealistic Christianity which appears before us *without* that Incarnation whereby we had expected the proposed re-consecration of the sinning universe to be effected, and wherein we had been wont to expect all the needs of human life and culture to be fully satisfied. Idealism creates its theological world without a sun, and denies to nature its

crowns. We have now seen some of its *ἀνομιαί*—its straits or awkwardnesses. It would be a harsh judgment to say that Professor Watson's service has consisted in setting before us Idealism naked—philosophically and theologically—without being ashamed, but it is both fair and true to say that no draperies with which his philosophical skill has invested it, have been able to make it a thing of beauty and a joy forever, either to the heart or to the intellect of man.

But a true idealism abides, despite all that has been said, even an idealistic philosophy, that founds the life of man, not upon a material order of things, but upon the Infinite Spirit. Of that idealism the final forms are not yet, and will when they appear make of idealism another than the rhapsodical thing it has so often been made. Our ideas are a veil that hides the universe from us so truly that our deepest life must be lived by faith, and not by sight. There is a mystery of existence unto whose ultimate explanation thought may not come. The idealism of Berkeley, that promised so much and wore such a theistic guise, has failed to take us beyond ourselves, and land us in the realm of external existence. For, in idealizing matter, and making ideas real, Berkeley did not make severely manifest the need to go beyond the principle of causality as a subjective principle—a principle of reason—and no subjective principle can furnish us with objective fact or reality. The absolute idealism of Hegel, too, has failed to give the exposition of God in his eternal essence which it promised, and has cast us upon a God with no existence better than that of a shadowy universal.

From such idealisms we come back feeling only that the spirit of speculation has no more sought and found rest than had the unquiet spirit that we read of in the Gospels. The dream, or mystery, of the universe is still with us—is with us in the precise form in which it is, and no otherwise—and no idealizings whatsoever can make it dream,

or mystery, of chaotic and hazy sort. So, then, for the character and existence of the world-process as it really is we still need a cause, and the nature and working of God, as the only such cause possible, need not be hid from view and knowledge, but for our blindness and turpitude. There can be nothing more philosophic than to seek such knowledge. In seeking it, we shall have no need to be under such a scare of "miraculism in every form" that the only Incarnation for us will be the life of Jesus as an Incarnation of his teaching—good enough, no doubt, so far as it goes. The *rapprochement* between Christianity and Idealism—on the religious rather than the philosophical side—is that which comes of faith's subjection of the actual to the ideal. The very meaning of the faith which Christianity has come to create in us is just this, that we have become touched with a new and ever-enlarging consciousness of the Infinite Ideal and of the ideal universe, in actualizing of which ideals the supreme good will for us be realized. A true idealism, we say, for thus the Divine significance of human life is reached as a persistent and inextinguishable conviction. Real Christianity never finds a basis steadfast and unmovable, till it so rests on the ideal, and the ideal must be made more vivid, and consequently more stimulating, to our spiritual imaginings and aspirations.