

able, but also more reverent, than the mechanical theory which is opposed to it ; and it has the further advantage of being in harmony with all that we know of the action of the Holy Spirit in our own time and in our own experience. The faith of such persons is no whit less real and true than that of the older Evangelicals in the holiness and love of the Father, in the Incarnation of the Divine Son and the Atonement wrought by Him, in the personality and the power of the Holy Ghost, the Life-Giver. They perceive in the Bible—and all the more clearly because they are friendly to modern criticism—the supreme message from God to mankind ; and they learn—and what comfort the lesson brings to them in these later days !—that He has sanctified the ordinary life of men and of nations to be the means of leading them ever onwards in the knowledge of His purposes, and of His love, and of Himself.



The Religious Philosophy of William James.

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I.

THE first of these two articles will be an attempt to give an account to the readers of the *CHURCHMAN* of the well-known American thinker who died some months ago—Professor William James, of Harvard. In the second we shall ask ourselves how far his method and conclusions are compatible with the religion which we believe.

He was a popular philosopher in the best sense of the word, a man who felt keenly the interest and importance of the deeper problems of life, and did his best to kindle the same interest in ordinary educated people by writing about philosophic subjects in a breezy, untechnical style. As he wrote he would have in his mind's eye before him an audience of typical American students of both sexes—keenly alert citizens of the modern

world, and fully alive to its religious questionings. For the most part, they would know very little indeed about either philosophy or religion, and would not be wedded to any particular religious organization; but religion is a subject about which they would be very anxious to learn to think intelligently, and they would be almost entirely free from the frigid scepticism of Continental Universities.

American students are not as a rule out-and-out unbelievers in religion, however vague their minds may be on such subjects. Religious observances and beliefs still figure largely in their social background, and practical religious activities—such as the student movement or the St. Andrew's Brotherhood—play so vigorous a part among them that religious convictions would never be waived aside with the airy incredulity of many a German lecture-room. And so, as he sat down to dash off his telling metaphors, and to remind the ideas of dryasdust academic thinkers into the crisp, direct language of the modern commercial world, Professor James saw before him the future leaders of American industry and social reform, to whom religious belief is still—to use his own phrase—“a living and momentous option” (“Will to Believe,” p. 3), and who are quite ready to listen to anyone who will prove to them that it is not irrational.

It was his temperament, perhaps we may say, rather than any definite choice or training, which led him to this rôle of the popular philosopher. His intellectual training was first as a doctor and then as a psychologist, or expert student of human nature. He turned to philosophy proper more or less late in life, and his knowledge of the technicalities of philosophic systems was probably not very extensive. He was always more interested in people than in books, and many are the stories told of his often Quixotic kindness to individuals who came to him for help and advice. He had the keenest sympathy for human experience of every kind, and was tenderly sensitive to the tragic side of things. I once had the privilege of meeting him at his house, and in the course of conversation the very

distressing illness of some friend was mentioned. I shall always remember, as characteristic of the man, the way in which he turned to me with the comment, "What awful burdens many of our fellow-creatures do have to bear!" Thus he was the last man in the world to be blind to the strongest objective test of religious convictions—the power they can give to men of rising superior to pain.

His earlier works dealt with his own proper subject of psychology, and in this field he made several distinctly important contributions to science. But his powers lay always rather in popular exposition than in technical research, and possibly, as time goes on, he may come to be known only as the author of the famous "Textbook of Psychology," which is an abridgment of his larger work. This book ought to be read by anyone who wants to know how to think about and describe his own faculties and feelings. He had quite a marvellous power of putting inner states of consciousness into words. Take, for instance, this description, on p. 218, of a state of mind well known to everybody, which he calls "dispersed attention":

"Most of us probably fall several times a day into a fit like this: The eyes are fixed on vacancy, the sounds of the world melt away into confused unity, the attention is dispersed so that the whole body is felt, as it were, at once, and the foreground of consciousness is filled, if by anything, by a sort of solemn sense of surrender to the empty passing of time. In the dim background of our mind we know meantime what we ought to be doing: getting up, dressing ourselves, answering the person who has spoken to us, trying to make the next step in our reasoning. But somehow we cannot start: every moment we expect the spell to break, for we know no reason why it should continue. But it does continue, pulse after pulse, and we float with it, until—also without reason that we can discover—an energy is given, something—we know not what—enables us to gather ourselves together, we wink our eyes, we shake our heads. The background ideas become effective, and the wheels of life go round again."

Every trait in human nature was interesting to him, and he had a masterly power of showing the connection of any facts which he had observed in himself or other people with the theory or principle that was under discussion. Take this passage, for instance, from his chapter on "Will" (p. 447). He is remarking on the falsity of saying that pleasure is always

the motive of action. Our real motive very often, he says, is a kind of perverse attraction towards what is painful :

“ In my University days a student threw himself down from an upper, entry window of the college buildings, and was nearly killed. Another student, a friend of my own, had to pass the window daily in coming and going from his room, and experienced a dreadful temptation to imitate the deed. Being a Catholic, he told his director, who said : ‘ All right ; if you must, you must ! ’ and added, ‘ Go ahead and do it, ’ thereby instantly quenching his desire. This director knew how to minister to a mind diseased. But we need not go to minds diseased for examples of the occasional tempting-power of simple badness and unpleasantness as such. Everyone who has a wound or hurt anywhere—a sore tooth, *e.g.*—will ever and anon press it just to bring out the pain. If we are near a new kind of stink, we must sniff it again, just to verify once more how bad it is. This very day I have been repeating over and over to myself a verbal jingle, whose mawkish silliness was the secret of its haunting power. I loathed yet could not banish it.”

The “ Textbook of Psychology ” was published in 1892, and since then he has come to be best known to ordinary readers by his excursions into the definitely religious sides of philosophy ; the stimulating volume of lectures and essays called “ The Will to Believe,” 1896 ; his Gifford lectures on “ The Varieties of Religious Experience,” 1902 ; and “ Pragmatism,” 1907. In the last of these one can see the definite expression of a view of life which is just suggested in the first, and implied all through the second. During the later years of his life he was in very bad health, and he would probably have been the first to admit that he had not been able to do justice to the thoughts which he was struggling to express.

If he had lived longer, it is conceivable that his views on religion might have undergone very considerable change, and he certainly always writes as one whose mind is still open to convictions which he recognizes as real forces in other people, and which he would like to see able to justify themselves to philosophic thought. I have often wondered what the result on him would have been if he could ever have come into effective contact with such theologians as Westcott, Illingworth, Scott Holland, or Du Bose.

He frankly admitted that of mystical experiences he knew

nothing "from the inside." "My constitution shuts me out from their enjoyment almost entirely, and I can speak of them only at second-hand" ("Religious Experience," p. 379). And for himself he confessed his "inability to accept either popular Christianity or scholastic theism" (p. 521), and yet he always insisted that the possibility of the religious view of life being true could never be ruled out as inconceivable. He looked on it as not proven, and was inclined to say we must wait for fresh evidence. The following passage from the lecture on "Pragmatism and Religion" exposes his attitude with characteristic downrightness and vivacity. He is anxious to remove the impression that he has not done justice to religious conviction:

"On pragmatistic principles, if the hypothesis of God works satisfactorily in the widest sense of the word, it is true. Now, whatever its 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. I cannot start upon a whole theology at the end of this last lecture; but when I tell you that I have written a book on men's religious experience, which on the whole has been regarded as making for the reality of God, you will perhaps exempt my pragmatism from the charge of being an atheistic system. I firmly disbelieve myself that our human experience is the highest form of experience extant in the universe. I believe rather that we stand in much the same relation to the whole of the universe as our canine and feline pets do to the whole of human life. They inhabit our drawing-rooms and libraries; they take part in scenes of whose significance they have no inkling. They are merely tangents to curves of history, the beginnings and ends and forms of which pass wholly beyond their ken. So we are tangent to the wider life of things. . . . Pragmatism has to postpone dogmatic answer, for we do not know certainly which type of religion is going to work best in the long run. The various over-beliefs of men, their several faith ventures, are in fact what is needed to bring the evidence in" ("Pragmatism," p. 299).

This quotation leads me on naturally to an attempt to give a sketch of William James's general attitude towards all philosophical and theological questions, without going at all into the technicalities of the philosophical system called pragmatism with which his name is connected.

He never pretended to be putting forward a complete system of thought of any kind. He looked on himself rather as the leader of a revolt against methods in philosophy which

he felt have led professional thinkers only into blind alleys, and have made the ordinary educated man turn away from philosophy with disappointment and disgust. Pragmatism, he was always insisting, is primarily nothing but a method ("Pragmatism," p. 166); what we want, before we can do anything, is a new method, a shifting of the emphasis, a change in philosophy's centre of gravity. To put it shortly, we want to make people look forwards instead of backwards, and give up relying on ready-made systems of thought, concocted nobody knows how, in the past. Don't let us go on imagining, he says in effect, that we know how to deal with our experience, and judging every new fact simply by the measure of some old formula. We shall never make any progress that way. And we shall fail to do justice to our mental faculties, which are meant to grow and advance, just like everything else.

"In our cognitive, as well as in our active, life we are creative. We *add*, both to the subject and to the predicate part of reality. The world stands really malleable, waiting to receive its final touches at our hands. Like the kingdom of heaven, it suffers human violence willingly. Man *engenders* truths upon it. No one can deny that such a rôle would add both to our dignity and to our responsibility as thinkers. To some of us it proves a most inspiring notion. Signor Papini, the leader of Italian pragmatism, grows fairly dithyrambic over the view that it opens of man's divinely-creative functions" ("Pragmatism," p. 256).

Thus, in spite of the best intentions, he is inevitably led on from demanding a new method to the formulation of a new system, and by it he must of course be judged.

William James is climbing the mountain of life, as it were, in the company of a friend who prides himself upon his map-reading. When they come to a difficult place, the friend pulls out his map, buries his face in it, and pronounces that the correct path will be to the right. William James, meantime, has been looking about him.

"Oh, bother your beastly map!" he exclaims. "It's perfectly clear that the left-hand path leads up the mountain. Anyhow, let's go and try. After all, experiment is the only way to find the truth."

"Well, but the map says just the opposite," protests his friend.

"Then chuck the map away!" retorts the buoyant American. "I don't believe the fellow who made it had ever been up this mountain himself at all."

"The absolutely true," he says, "meaning what no further experience will ever alter, is that ideal vanishing-point towards which we imagine that all our temporary truths will some day converge. It runs on all-fours with the perfectly wise man, and with the absolutely complete experience: and, if these ideals are ever realized, they will all be realized together. Meanwhile we have to live to-day by what truth we can get to-day, and be ready to-morrow to call it falsehood" ("Pragmatism," p. 222).

The only test we have for deciding whether our views about things are "true" or not is whether they "work" satisfactorily in the long run.

Here, of course, we come upon the philosophical and epistemological controversy between the Pragmatists and the people whom James calls the Rationalists, and into that it is not the purpose of this article to enter. We have seen his general attitude of mind, however, clearly enough to be able now to understand the way in which he looked at religion.

Let us imagine him facing an audience such as we described above:

"You are not out-and-out materialists—I am quite sure of that. You are prepared to deal respectfully with the religious attitude towards life. You see through the folly of trying to dispose of religious melancholy and enthusiasm by a simple flourish of the word 'insanity,' and you intend to allow religious experiences to rank as real facts" (see "Varieties of Religious Experience," p. 10 *et seq.*). "But you probably are no more prepared than I am to accept any religious system as true in such a way as to argue deductively from it, and mould your own opinions and practice upon it. The truth is, we do not know about God in the way those old scholastics imagined we did, with their clear-cut definitions of His nature and their pompous descriptions of His attributes" (see "Varieties of Religious Experience," p. 430 *et seq.*).

“These attempts to draw up systems of religious knowledge have been the death of real religion. They have petrified men’s minds, and made it almost impossible for them to enjoy real, spontaneous religious experience. What we want here, as in the theory of knowledge generally, is a new method that will unstiffen our theories and give us a more flexible way of thinking altogether” (“Pragmatism,” p. 79).

“I want to start, then, by disarming your very natural prejudice against religious institutions and theological systems by frankly throwing them both overboard. Historically religion has invariably tended to ally itself with two wicked partners—the spirit of corporate dominion and the spirit of dogmatic dominion. The first has produced ecclesiastical, the second theological, bigotry, and these have alienated men’s minds from religion altogether” (“Varieties of Religious Experience,” p. 337).

“But these undesirable alliances do not invalidate the original individual experience of Divine help, and it is with this alone that we are concerned. Conversion and saintliness are facts from which we cannot and do not want to get away, however little we may understand them for ourselves. There are unfathomable potentialities of development in human souls, smouldering fires in the subconscious regions of our natures, which may at any moment break out into life. And when this happens, as times without number it has happened, a new type of human activity is produced, infinitely more attractive and powerful than the ordinary humdrum reasonable ‘moral’ person can ever show. No one who is not willing to try charity, to try non-resistance, as the saint is always willing, can tell whether these methods will or will not succeed. When they do succeed, they are far more powerfully successful than force or worldly prudence. These saintly methods of handling experience are nothing less than creative energies, and the practical proof which the saints give, that worldly methods can successfully be neglected and transcended, is the magic gift of religious experience to mankind” (“Varieties of Religious Experience,” p. 357).

“Such men show us that they have a superior way of hand-

ling life to ours, and therefore it is simply absurd for us to tell them they are mistaken when they say that their power comes from belief in God. But we are not, on that account, obliged to believe that there can be only one right form of belief, any more than there is only one right kind of physical diet. Different men's constitutions require different kinds of stimulants, and all we can do is to observe what beliefs do affect different men in a satisfactory way, and draw a few provisional conclusions. After all, we are all of us only creatures of a day. We live from hand to mouth, from morning till evening, in our spiritual life, no less than in our physical life, and all our insights can be only provisional" ("Pragmatism," p. 223 ; "Varieties of Religious Experience," p. 333).

That would be a fair account, I think, of the way Professor James thought and spoke about religion ; and we ought to be interested in it, because he has put into words just what multitudes of educated people are thinking all round us. His mind has been, as it were, the draw-net which has pulled up into view a great multitude of those fishes which our Lord has sent us Christians out to catch. To a very great extent, it is from people who have been interested in religious subjects by books like these that the Christian Church of the next generation has to be built.

What, then, are we going to say about it all? We shall certainly have to criticize it pretty severely, but first of all let us be clear about what is good in it. It is a new method of handling religious facts by a man who does not profess to be religious, and has no particular theological axe to grind. He is not wanting to "convert" people to faith or to atheism. He is a man of science, who wishes simply to observe, analyze, and appreciate the significance of the facts before him. And the facts he places before him are the fruits of religious faith in individual lives. He asks himself two questions about them : What value has all this religion for human life? and, What does it tell us about the unseen powers of the universe?

So long as he is dealing simply with the first question, I

think we feel that he is justified in his method, and that we have much to be grateful for in his work. The tree of faith, we have been taught, is to be known and judged by its fruits. We are bidden to commend ourselves to the consciences of those who are without, and it is a great help for once to meet an outsider who is so intelligent, and unbiassed, and sympathetic. The religious man, when he meets Professor James, feels he is going to have a fair hearing, and he is not disappointed. He is not asked, as so often happens when the outside world condescends to take an interest in Christianity, how many soup-kitchens he has started, and whether he has written a satisfactory textbook on metaphysics. "Religious institutions and theologies may be important," says this keen-eyed American doctor, "in their proper place, but they are not fundamental. What I want to know about is your own soul, and what difference your religion has made in your innermost personal life." We find ourselves challenged, that is, to give an account of our religion in regard to the things which we know to be really important: Has conversion been a reality to you? Does fresh light really stream in upon you through prayer? Has your new life produced the fruits of loving service?

And then, having listened to our story and looked us full in the face, this kindly specialist does not leave us to plead our own cause all by ourselves any more. He goes out to the world, and says: "No, these people are not mad, most noble Festus, but speak forth the words of truth and soberness. The products of religious faith are scientific facts in the fullest sense of the word."

So far he has invited the religious people to speak for themselves, and has allowed his mind to be impressed by their testimony; but when he passes on to his second question, he adopts a much less teachable attitude, and allows all kinds of unconscious prejudices to bias his judgment. "What can we learn from these facts about the unseen forces of the universe?" he asks, and to all intents and purposes his answer is, "Nothing." At the end of all this lifelong study of the work of God's Spirit

in the hearts of men, he seems to have come no nearer himself to a living faith in God, and he certainly has no creed to preach to his students. Religious people differ so widely, he concludes, in their ideas of God, and such different creeds all produce such excellent results, that we cannot say of any one set of beliefs, "This is the way: walk ye in it." They are all interesting, and, for those who accept them, all are valuable, but none are conclusive. And the consequence is that his books, in spite of his arguments for the reasonableness of the believing attitude of mind, are turning out a generation of young people interested in all creeds, but adherents of none, patronizing everybody else's ideas of God, but quite content to get along without any of their own. Professor James's new theological method has cut at the roots of all the old idea that there is such a thing as the revealed truth about God, and that belief in it is a duty. The consequence is, however far it may be from what he desired to do for his generation, that his works will prove, unless some writer of equal attractiveness and power is raised up to expose their deficiencies, the most terribly efficient ally of scepticism. We shall try to consider this more in detail in our second article.

(To be continued).



The Reflex Influence at Home of Missions Abroad.

BY MRS. ASHLEY CARUS-WILSON, B.A.

WE have long regarded Foreign Missions as having to do with the saving of the world; we are at last beginning to learn that they have to do with the saving of the Church also. This lesson is set forth clearly and frequently in Holy Scripture, though missed by many who read their Bibles regularly. It is writ large in the pages of church history, though it has often been obscured by the dust of controversy that envelopes ecclesiastical records. Why, for instance, did Greek Christianity become so weak in the seventh century,