

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Bibliotheca Sacra* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bib-sacra_01.php

THE
BIBLIOTHECA SACRA

ARTICLE I.

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE.

BY THE REV. A. A. BERLE, D. D.

THE interpretation of religious experience has always been the great and baffling problem in the study of man. Religion has always been a necessary and integral portion of his daily life,—sometimes expressed, sometimes unexpressed,—and has, on the whole, probably been the largest determinative factor in his existence. He has made his religion, and then unmade it. He has explained it, and then thrown away the explanation. He has erected institutions to perpetuate it, and then destroyed those institutions and created others. He has at various times determined to get along without it, but in doing this has merely given it another form. In a thousand ways he has been working at the question of finding out what this inner spirit in him which made for religion and the religious life was like and whence it came. Sometimes he has thought that he could find out by withdrawing from the world and leading a monastic existence. At other times, as in our day, a large number of men under the influence of a genuinely religious motive have determined that they would, so to speak, utterly unfrock themselves, and in the turmoil

and turbulence of the world catch the elusive thing. But neither in the world or out of it, neither in building new institutions or tearing down old ones, neither in breaking down old creeds or formulating new ones, neither in talking to himself or talking with others, has any one yet given us a decisive and satisfactory answer to the quest which is as universal as man and as endless as his existence.

Nor is the expectation of finding a suitable interpretation of religious experience by the methods which in our time are called psychological entirely new. It is perfectly clear, from the careful study of the older evangelists, that they knew the physical aspects of religious demonstration quite as well as some of our modern psychologists. There are still portions of our land remote from the centers of knowledge and civilization where the thing can be seen in operation to-day where psychology has not been heard of, and where there is the utmost innocency in respect to neurology or any other of the scientific terms which are now used to express certain forms of mental life and action. The revivalist of the former day, by a law which was as true in its way as any other law known to us, gravitated naturally to the forms of speech, the physical exaltation, and the passionate magnetism which produced conviction and conversion. And he did not do this utterly without knowledge. Frequent repetition taught him the value of certain modes of address. He was led unconsciously to discriminate as to the state of mind of the hearers whom he addressed. He knew, speaking broadly, almost by intuition what to do and what to leave undone. He knew by a certain instinct, still speaking broadly, when to drop the live wire of a particular emotion. The present writer has himself seen a powerful negro evangelist work an audience to a high pitch of excitement which was momentarily growing stronger and fiercer, and, while seeming himself to be utterly carried away, almost in a frenzy himself, certainly as

nearly in a state which could be called crazy as the ordinary observer would wish to see any one, in the very midst of it, seeing another burly negro rapidly becoming dangerous in his ecstasy, rapidly march to the spot where the excited hearer swung his arms and threatened seriously to injure men and women and children about him, strike him a sharp blow on the head, which instantaneously reduced him to a more submissive and less dangerous religious demonstration. The casual onlooker would have said that the preacher and the listener were equally frenzied. But this was not at all the case apparently. Or, if it was the case, there was a certain subconsciousness in the preacher which very clearly saw and regarded the danger-point of religious enthusiasm, and promptly and effectively kept it within the safety sphere. This has not been less true in the history of other evangelists of the cruder type. They had no psychological nomenclature, but they knew the thing itself quite as well as some of their more learned brethren. And they handled it with a directness and practicality which resulted not in academic disputation, but not a little in intelligible righteousness.

Religious experience, therefore, is an old subject which has ever attracted the attention of religious leaders and devotees. And the study of that experience, and the effort to lead and control it, is also a very old thing. One of the most interesting evidences of this is found in the uniform recurrence of certain facts of religious experience. This recurrence shows not merely that the experiences were uniform, but it also shows that the environments in which they were produced were, for the most part, similar and essentially one. And this in turn shows that the insight and shrewdness of the revival producers were by no means lacking in the matter of providing the suitable conditions under which the demonstration was to take place. One of the reasons why the modern revival of religion is not, and

cannot be, as effective as those of former days, is precisely for this reason, namely, that the complexity of interests and the competition for attention in our modern life make it impossible to so arrange the details of religious services for a considerable period as to bring the mind and will naturally to the point of decision and action. It is not entirely a question of view and religious interest. It is quite as much a matter of such an arrangement of progress in thought and emotion as will naturally bring the hearer to the decisive moment. Any one who has attended Christian Science services will at once recall how much stress is laid upon the attitude of expectant attention, and how the worshipers are urged and the opportunity is given to forget all but the effort to concentrate the mind and will on a single object. Attendants at these services have repeatedly told the writer that the silent prayer was the most thrilling and effective part of their service.

Academic interest in religious experience, however, is comparatively recent. The psychology of religion is one of the things which has come into our horizon within a very short period. Hitherto the academic interest in religion and religious experience has been of the lofty type which has had only pity for the submerged millions who talked about religious experience, and attended class-meetings, prayer-meetings, and the like. We confidently look now to see the horde of psychologists, full-fledged and embryo, hurrying to prayer-meetings and revival-gatherings, note-book in hand, yearning for data. Nay, we even see a revival-laboratory suitably equipped with emotional, non-emotional, intellectual, sick-soul, and well-soul preachers, properly installed, established in every well-regulated university, that the psychologist of religion may see the thing at work. We shall talk about our "conversion" just as we talk about our headaches, our neuralgia, our rheumatism, and we shall know precisely what specialist to send

for when our sin-sick spirits lead us to feel the need of something in the religious line for the soul. Just what this will mean for religion pure and undefiled, is another matter. What it will mean in the practical assuaging of sorrow, in translating despair and discouragement into hope and enthusiasm, in making the forgiveness of sin real and living in the heart, are questions, of course, which will still have to be handled by the ignorant and simple-minded pastor, who will still pray in the old way, give the promise of hope and forgiveness in the old way, if he gives it at all, will still urge repentance and amendment of life as the necessary gateway to godliness, and act as though the satisfying of hunger was more needful than a dissertation on the chemistry of bread-making. And the psychologist will still say, as some who read this will think, that this represents obscurantism and utter oblivion to the movements of modern thought, and a senseless hostility to the advance movements of the human mind. And they will have their reward in the crass satisfaction which always accompanies this spirit.

But all these views cannot, and do not, make the approach to Professor James's Gifford lectures on "Varieties of Religious Experience"¹ any less interesting or entertaining. It should be said for the foregoing views, in passing, that Professor James in this book, as in others of his works, shows very clearly that he knows that behind their solemn faces most of the regulation psychologists look upon this whole business as child's play. Indeed he even seems to indicate that he feels that they in their own minds think that he is playing to the galleries, and working in psychology what the politicians are in the habit of calling the "re-

¹ Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature. The Gifford Lectures on Natural Religion delivered at Edinburgh in 1901-02. Third Series. 8vo. Pp. xii, 334. New York: Longmans, Green & Co. 1902. \$3.20, net.

ligious racket." Professor James has, for a number of years now, been under this suspicion by the more orthodox both of medical men and psychologists. His appearances before the Massachusetts Legislature for the modification of the very rigorous laws of medical supervision in that State have more than once brought down upon his head the reproaches of his orthodox brethren. And, as stated, his fellow-psychologists—shall we call them the Pharisees and Sadducees of the psychological cult?—have long felt that Professor James was too ready to give this religious matter entirely too large a place in his thinking. Indeed, at least one of his contemporaries has said—not in public, we believe, but certainly in private—that what we are seeing in Professor James's discussion of the psychological aspects of religion is the expression of Professor James's own religious experience, which makes it interesting enough as a point of view, but gives it no special authority for the guidance of others.

Moreover, the reading of the Gifford Lectures is made interesting for another reason, which has some significance. After heaping contempt upon the emotional evangelists for these many years, and almost exhausting the vocabulary of academic reproach, it is somewhat striking to find that the chief source of material for the discussion of the whole subject lies in the remains of these very same people whose religion as religion is always spoken of with contempt. The biographies of the revivalists, the experiences of missionaries, the meditations of the old-time saints, seem to form the mine from which this new cult gets its gold. It is interesting and amusing to observe that few, if any, of these psychological interpreters give us any insight into their own religious life and thought. Their own religious experience has the somewhat suspicious appearance of being parasitic upon that of the old fellows. And not the least interesting fact is that the old nomenclature

is sought and revived as descriptive of the thing itself. It is very interesting to read two chapters on "Conversion" from the pen of a Harvard professor. A sermon on conversion addressed to the students of Harvard College would be a more interesting phenomenon. A still more interesting phenomenon would be the reception of a student who sought under deep conviction of sin a professor of psychology for comfort, guidance, and relief.

The comfortable reflection about it all lies in this, that at last the scientific discussion of religious experience has come into an area where the judgments of the ordinary man are quite as valuable as those of the specialist. The religious man himself can test these things for himself very readily. And that, after all, is the only sure way of getting at the basis of the whole matter. What we want is the interpretation of our religious experience. We are willing to get it through psychology if that can give it to us. We are willing to get it through any other science that cares to try it. Various of them have tried it, and after they have finished their speeches we have had a certain uneasy feeling that while there was something in it, for practical use and power it did not amount to very much. Scientist after scientist has ventured to tell us just what produced our religion, but it must be admitted that the working church has not gained a great deal from the explanations. We must be pardoned, therefore, if, after we have taken the time and trouble to master this new vocabulary of explanation of religious phenomena and at the conclusion thereof we find ourselves still face to face with the previous question as to how we shall produce the phenomena which we are trying to explain, we have a feeling that we have been discussing, to resume our figure, the chemistry of bread-making while our function was to satisfy hunger. The ultimate test of such a book as Professor James's Gifford Lectures on the practical side is

this: Will a truly religious man,—not an orthodox Christian be it borne in mind, but a religious mind who has only the elementary religious emotions and convictions,—after reading about these varieties of experience and the author's dissertations concerning them, find his religious life deeper and his hold on religion stronger? If a man has a broken leg, let us suppose, and, seeking information how to set it, he picks up a book which is supposed to deal with fractures of one kind and another, and finds after he has read it that he does not know any more what to do to restore that leg than he did before, whatever may be the value of that book as a discussion of broken legs, it is useless to him. In a similar way any discussion of religious experience should have such an effect upon him who reads it, which will so validate his own experience if he has any, or that of others of which he has only a record, that he shall find the possession of his experience on the one hand a comfort, and the knowledge of its reality on the other, a reason for effort for its attainment. It is on this basis that "Varieties of Religious Experience" is here reviewed.

THE VALIDITY OF RELIGIOUS PHENOMENA.

The first and most striking impression which Professor James's book makes, as a whole, upon the Christian reader, is the unaffected and thoroughgoing way in which the phenomena of religious experience, especially Christian experience, are accepted as valid subjects of scientific inquiry and discussion. It is in this particular that the Harvard professor differs from many other investigators in this branch of psychology. We do not recall anywhere in the entire volume meeting a passage in which the attitude is other than one of serene and absolute confidence that the experiences described or discussed are other than real things to those who present them, and the simplicity with which the most startling records are introduced as evidence

is calculated to make one rub his eyes to see whether after all it is not merely a dream. For it must not be overlooked, that to accept a record of religious experience at its face value, even though classified as an hallucination, is not less an act of cr edence as to its worth as testimony than it is to accept the same testimony as evidence of a totally different cause. For example, Professor James introduces many experiences which have hitherto been explained on other and very much simpler grounds than those which he presents,—grounds which, if they have less appearance of erudition, are not less full of great and deep significance. One man sees in an experience a clearly recognized type of hallucination, induced by perfectly well-known physical and psychical causes. Another sees what he is pleased to call a work of the Holy Spirit, and, while possibly not denying the mediate causes, finds the potential force behind the mediate processes the activity of God. Now it looks like a great gain to have the thing itself accepted, and the most interesting fact in connection with it is, that the reality of the experience is not essentially challenged in even the least particular. There are indeed remnants of the old-time sneers about divine interposition, and Professor James still shrinks from using a terminology which is distinctively Christian; but he does not deny the nature or valid character of the phenomena which are brought before him. When the experiences of a Finney or a Rutherford are produced, they are accepted as accurate and substantially true transcripts of what the subject passed through. Now this is nothing more nor less than making the whole case rest upon an agreed statement of the facts. The actual, real, and valid character of the experiences is not brought into question at all. The interpretation of the experience and its real content is another matter; but it is a noteworthy fact, that, as an antecedent proposition, throughout the book the substantially valid

character of the religious phenomena, especially the phenomena of Christian experience, is not challenged.

Now this spirit seems admirable, and cannot be otherwise than gratifying to religious-minded people; and especially to those who have chafed under the assaults of those who have denied that these things were real, and that it was sheer folly or something else to talk about them. And there is a general disposition to rejoice over this gracious attitude. But a more sober reflection will somewhat qualify this joy, and make us rather join with Professor James's professional critics in saying that he exhibits here a credulity which is hardly accordant with the demands of the enlightened intellect of our age. Indeed, this criticism must be made upon most of the material upon which the present generalizations of those who are writing and speaking most on the psychology of religion rest. It looks incredible that this entire mass of testimony should have scientific worth; and nothing but a very thorough prejudice can so readily accept the statements which men and women, however gifted, make as to what moved them in their conversion, especially when the statements are made twenty to twenty-five or more years after the event. There is something too much like describing the pain of a toothache ten years ago in this whole proceeding. Most of Professor Coe's and Professor Starbuck's material is of this class. Now it is well known that in physical pain, where the experiences are far more vivid and intelligible, there are comparatively few patients who are able to describe accurately the point where the pain exists, much less the nature of it. Is it probable that, even in a matter so important as conversion, many men will be able, years after the event, especially when they have been subjects of Christian training and discipline which have left a strong impress upon the mind and memory, to recall with anything like scientific accuracy just what happened on that

occasion? We are not unaware that these psychologists think that they have a way of testing the truth of these things, but the ordinary standards of evidence do not readily yield to the belief that such testimony is very valuable, for the particular purpose for which it is brought forth. Professor James's critics, and all the critics of the school of what might be called skeptics concerning religious experiences, have here certainly a sound cause. Instead of feeling elated that Professor James, or any one else, should so readily accept the valid character of these experiences in their entirety, and proceed to build up a system of psychology of religion upon them, we feel rather that there is introduced a method which, in the long run, will be damaging to all sound interpretation of religion, because there is brought into the common view of religious experience a habit of thought which, sooner or later, the common sense of mankind will pronounce false and which will make the latter skepticism worse than the former. It is, in the judgment of the present writer, one of the worst cases of the credulity of science, if it be science, that he has ever known. With the fullest sympathy for the effect of these experiences, and with the heartiest appreciation of the greatness and power of the lives which grew out of them, we cannot swallow in this reckless fashion, as evidence of things unseen, the testimonies which if made at the time would be defective, because few men can accurately make a self-diagnosis under the very best conditions, and which, made after years of increment of religious activity, instruction, and discipline, are undoubtedly of some scientific worth, but for the particular purposes to which they are applied, in our judgment, scientifically worthless or nearly so.

Now this must not be understood as denying the true and valid character of the phenomena themselves. We believe in religious experience; but it must be stated, that, historically, it is beyond question, that the experiences

which have been most powerful have in general most successfully eluded characterization and classification. The experiences have been real, true, effective, and reformatory. Indeed, they have been revolutionary in thousands of cases. But the explanation of them, the endeavor to give scientific statement or even evidential form to them, has, in general, been so helpless and useless a performance, that, for the most part, the Christian world has ceased to hope to persuade men by means of them. Note how the so-called experience-meetings of churches have disappeared. Note how the most emotional of sects have steadily dropped the very forms of expression and life by which they originally came into being. Notice how the highly disciplined religious mind becomes more and more reticent about the inner things which constitute its life and hope. Every working pastor consciously or unconsciously distrusts the garrulous type of Christian. And, while it would be ungracious to cast the slightest imputation upon the masses of those who have faithfully endeavored to present a transcript of their religious experiences for scientific classification and interpretation, the fact still remains, that, for the most part, they would not, and could not, stand even the simplest cross-examination on the matter. And quite naturally too, and without the slightest discredit. Most of these data have absolutely no means of verification. They can be subjected to no test at all, but the subjective test of the investigator's own mind. And even in his mind, they undergo a change which may or may not alter their character as evidence. Every page of Professor James's book shows this. For example, in discussing the sense of the nearness and constancy of the Divine presence, in introducing the testimony of a "man aged forty-nine,—probably thousands of unpretending Christians would write an almost identical account,"—Professor James jocosely says, "Of the more habitual and so to speak chronic sense of

God's presence the following sample," etc. *The chronic sense of God's presence! So to speak!* Is it likely that the "man aged forty-nine" would have anything else than a diabolic rush of blood to the head, if he had anything like a normal spinal column, to have his deeper spiritual instincts and impressions thus characterized in the nomenclature of the clinic? Our contention is that there is something in the nature and experience of the man who can so style the experience of another man, as to make him utterly unable not merely to ground it scientifically but even, in its real essence, to recognize it. The simple-hearted country pastor who never heard of psychology, would know this thing better in one instant of his ignorance, than a thousand experts to whom it is an illustration of "the chronic sense of God's presence." It is pleasant, no doubt, to have the simplest and most unreasoning expressions of our religious experience so readily and inclusively adopted as perfectly valid testimony, though we must confess that our delight at the hospitality of the psychologists in receiving them is somewhat dashed to find that, after pawing them over, they tag them with the other chronic cases, which finally pass into the list of incurables, where they linger till they come once again into notice as subjects for post-mortem erudition and investigation.

Viewed on its strictly logical side, this note of credulity and lack of thoroughness impresses us throughout. There is an undertone of jaunty pleasantry about the whole discussion which somehow forbids our taking the matter seriously. The religious "gallery" may applaud and make a great deal of this sort of thing; but sober theologians, especially careful pastors, will rather feel that, after all, the strictures of the conservative psychologists, who refuse to take evidence so easily and build up theories so airily, are worth a more careful examination. We want our experiences accepted, and, in so far as Professor James and others find

themselves able to believe that they are valid, we are gratified. But we do not want, and the Christian people as a whole will not permit, the experiences of the church to be grounded even superficially in these transitory and least impressive elements, which, while furnishing the materials for thought and suggestion, are never to be confounded with the real power which is over and behind them.

THE CLASSIFICATION OF SOULS.

In the "Postscript" of Professor James's book he has occasion to remark that "common sense is less sweeping in its demands than philosophy or mysticism, and can suffer the notion of this world being partly saved and partly lost." This is nothing more or less than the absolute truth, especially that part of the statement which sees the differentiations of the saved and lost, or, possibly better, those who are being saved and those who are being lost. But this common sense, whether it make a less exacting demand than that of philosophy or mysticism or not, has also certain repugnances which are irresistible and permanent in the spiritual structure of man. One of these is the unwillingness, if it be not the entire inability, to make a sliding scale of soul values or a classification of soul life. It somehow demands that, if the soul is spoken about at all, it shall be the universal soul, that is, in terms which apply to all souls alike. It shrinks from thinking of itself apart, for two reasons, the first being that exceptionalness means isolation and loneliness, and second that isolation somehow involves loss of status or character in the total soul life of the world. In practical Christian work nothing is more common than that, while a truly penitent man is willing enough to admit his guilt and confess his faults, he instantly resents, and properly resents, having the same facts brought forward by any one but himself. The same phenomenon appears in the New Tes-

tament. The man who is willing, himself being judge, to pronounce judgment upon himself as the chief of sinners, indignantly and with all his might withstands those who on that assumption wish to make certain deductions which bear upon his practical relations. It is not what grows out of the assumption that he resents. He feels that his sin and his sinfulness, while his own are not less a part of a universal sinfulness, which enables a being to define his own guilt and indulge in all kinds of self-accusation truthfully, but will not for a moment tolerate the thing from other lips than his own.

Now there are no chapters in this volume more interesting than those which deal with the "religion of healthy-mindedness" and "the sick soul" and with "saintliness." These are thoroughly descriptive terms. The facts which are presented and the analyses of them are not fundamentally at variance with what most people who have engaged in serious Christian work have known for many years. Indeed, one of the interesting things about the whole new revival of psychological religious study lies in that it is steadily leading to the rejuvenation of terms and ideas which are now commonly thought of as belonging to a former and less gifted theology than our own, and a type of religious expression which used to be styled crude and in use only among the uneducated. But, after this has been said, immediately there arises the question, Just what is the soundness of a classification which permits the expression the "sick soul," and what can be the worth of a discussion of the "value of saintliness" as related to a practical and vital conception of religion?

Here the natural place to turn for light is the New Testament. It is a fairly sound statement, that, in general, all known Christian experience has endeavored to express itself along New Testament lines. By this we mean that Christians of every generation have ordinarily carried their

religious life to the New Testament for correction and approval. If they found words there confirming and sustaining them in the positions which they held, they have usually regarded the experience as grounded in the Word of God, and gone on their ways rejoicing. If they failed to find their experience vocalized there, they have not generally assumed that the Bible was false, but that they themselves were mistaken either in their view of their own experiences or in their interpretation of the Bible. Now it is very certain that the New Testament does not make the distinctions which are here suggested as among the needful elements for the thorough discussion of the psychology of religion. The entire teaching of the New Testament regards all human souls as "sick souls," and "saintliness" is never once, that we can recall, discussed on the basis of value. In the whole story of Jesus' ministry, the thing which is most clearly revealed is the essential uniformity of his method of approach. Whether it be a talk with a ruler of the Jews, a rich young prince, a poor Samaritan woman, or one of his own disciples, the point of approach for the correction and instruction and inspiration of the soul is one. There is not even a great difference of phraseology. There are no fundamentally differing assumptions. Now the personages who came under the ministry of Jesus were exceedingly varied in type, character, and intellectual and spiritual attainment. But in the Gospels we cannot discern an elaboration of method or form which would lead us to think that Jesus regarded this man as of one type and that man of another. Indeed, if he did so regard them, the most interesting fact is that he totally disregarded all the differentiations, and struck home to the point of unity, and based his words and his work upon those universal characteristics of the spiritual life which are everywhere and always the same. And this is what we should expect. Christ knew no orders of spirituality.

There might be degrees of discernment or education or personal capacity. But sin and saintliness were things that were universal in their nature.

Moreover, this is confirmed by the history of the church. Over and over again, when these various distinctions, always man-made and sustained by external authority of some kind, have become sufficiently odious, a rebellion has reasserted the essential democracy of spiritual life required, and that the universal language and designation be restored. Protestantism especially rests upon this fact, and almost upon this fact alone. Now it is entirely competent, and not at all at variance with a reasonable inquiry into the nature of religious experience, especially in a "study of human nature," to take various forms of experience, and hold that these typify the "sick soul." But one cannot fail to have, especially if one has anything like a thorough knowledge of the religious movement in a considerable area, the conviction that many of the phenomena which are typical to these observant classifiers of souls, of the "religion of healthy-mindedness," do in fact indicate something very different,—that much of this healthy-minded religion is indicative of deadly soul-sickness. Indeed, in this portion of the work the superficiality of the whole psychological method comes very strongly to the front. In a similar way every pastor of experience knows that what is called the religion of the "sick-soul" is often accompanied by qualities and attributes of character which betoken spiritual health, if anything in this world does. On these particular points, the classification is so difficult that even those who are face to face with the experiences every day of their lives can hardly tell what the true interpretation of them often really is. Christian workers have again and again sought by a mechanical process to seek out texts for different classes of inquirers. But every one who knows anything about it knows, that not once in a hundred times

was the text selected the one which met the case, granting that it was a matter of texts, which it usually was not. The simple truth is, that, throughout all this area of spiritual experience and religious manifestation, the effort at classification is grotesque, unreal, and mechanical. The contemplation of such a classification by a well-balanced spiritual nature excites something very much akin to disgust. There is a revolt in the very depths of the nature against any attempt to separate by such a classification the souls of men. We feel that we may not all have the same education, the same dress, the same language, the same culture, the same resources of personal equipment or possession, but the common sense of mankind has always held, and held in spite of all attempts to differentiate men in spiritual quality, that, when stripped to the spiritual remainders, the souls of men were essentially alike; indeed, it would not be too much to state, that the judgment of men has been, whether Christian or otherwise, that the immortality which for the great majority of our own race is the whole content of religion involves the democracy of the spiritual life,—that there are no distinctions before God, but that all are alike in his presence. They can and do maintain greater or less confidence in this belief. But all who have any religion whatever or hope of immortality hold, along with the thought of another life, a life where distinctions vanish, and where only the universal elements of life, especially of the spiritual life, are retained.

It is therefore in our judgment far from contributory to a genuine or lasting understanding of religious experience to thus classify the soul life. The great preachers of Christendom have uniformly kept to the great universal landmarks of human nature. It is a great mistake to take the only cases that come to a hospital, and upon these base a theory of what all the people outside are like. There are millions of people who know nothing, and will never know

anything, of most of the diseases which occupy the medical practitioner and the surgeon. This whole method is the method of the pathologist, which is fundamentally false as applied to the spiritual life. The universal sinfulness of man and the pain and misery and shame and degradation which are incident to it, are two questions, not one. This is why all the philanthropy in the world will never produce a religious life. This is why the lopping off of particular sins will not bring the sense of forgiveness for sin. This is why the observation and classification of the accidents of behavior, whether physiological or psychological, will never give either accurate or sufficient data for a classification of souls. It is the method that is false. So false is it, that a prominent advocate of it did not hesitate to say, that, according to its mode of a procedure, a baby was not humanity, only a "candidate for humanity." But the world stupidly keeps on regarding it as humanity, and deals rather severely with those who regard it only as a candidate and take liberties with it which the law does not sanction. The objection to soul classification lies in the fact that true spiritual states are necessarily universal in their character, and that the question of sin and righteousness, which is the one on which all formal religion finally rests itself, certainly all Christian religion, will admit only two forms of expression, that which is sinful, and that which is righteous. The sinful may have the religious characteristics which are "healthy-minded," while the righteous may show forth the signs that denote a "sick soul," but these fictitious and wholly superficial elaborations of religious experience denote nothing but the materials of expression for a mass of speculations which, for the most part, if we admit them all absolutely accurate, have no special suggestion or instructiveness for the practical life of obedience to God and the service of man. From every point of view it is introspective, pathological,

itself sick with the virus of a diseased speculative habit, which, having almost exhausted itself in literature and the drama, is now endeavoring to secure a new lease of life by corrupting the springs of the spiritual life. We may be sick, but we do not go around with labels and diagnoses hanging on our backs. And when we are well, we just go about our business, likewise without advertisement. The practical Christian sense of the world has abhorred nothing more than to have descriptive tags placed upon its inner life. It has always insisted that communion with God was above such a process. This has been its safety and its power. It will not begin now to introduce a system of psychological tags to define the nature and extent of either its conception of God or its relations to God.

CONVERSION.

It is when we come to the subject of conversion, however, that we see how utterly the methods pursued by Professor James and others fail, not only to be useful and instructive, but are extremely liable to mislead and deceive the casual reader. Professor James's "conversion" is a sort of religious bargain-counter on which one may find about anything he likes. If the result is satisfactory, then the bargain was a good one, and the process legitimate and to be valued. If the bargain was a bad bargain, which again must be judged by what the purchaser gets, then it clearly indicates that the thing must be relegated to the back room and left to decay. It is worth while here to call attention to a practical fact which every pastor knows to be a fact. This is, that almost every conversion finds, as a rule, least acceptance among those who know the subject best. Indeed, this is the reason why young people and older people alike have the greatest hesitation in communicating their spiritual needs and anxieties to those to whom they are most closely allied. Children seek their teachers

or pastors rather than their parents. Men seek their friends rather than their own wives. Women go to outsiders, to the pastor, or to intimate friends, rather than to their husbands, in the first announcement of their religious experiences. The commonly assigned reason for this, which we see no reason to doubt and which is a thoroughly satisfactory explanation as well, is, that the people who live most closely to us know our faults better than others, and hence a greater demand is made upon them to believe in the truth of our desire for a better life and the reality of our spiritual impressions. Hence it is easier and perfectly natural to seek, first of all, encouragement from an outside source, and not infrequently young converts ask that nothing be said of their conversion, till they have become strong enough to make the announcement themselves, evidently feeling that such an announcement was of itself another crisis. This is a perfectly well-known phenomenon in all our churches.

Now this shows that there is an expectation of scrutiny and possible criticism in the hearts and minds of the converts from their intimate associates which is based upon the knowledge of previous wrong-doing. And it also shows that there is, even when the experience is most clear and the heart most truly penitent, a consciousness of inability to stand this scrutiny without great discomfort, which in turn is based in a feeling that possibly the effort will lead to the abandonment of the new life altogether. The newly converted nature oftentimes, indeed as a rule, fears this process, and wilts before it as a flower before a blast of winter wind. It cannot show its credentials in a moment, in a satisfactory way, to the critical onlooker. It somehow knows that, while the critical spirit prevails, there is a great gulf fixed, and that certain things will not be understood and be believed in until the critic has himself been converted. And yet it does not doubt the reality

of its own conversion, and, when it has been sufficiently nurtured and trained, it usually takes on a life of power and effectiveness. But, with many people, this fear is never lost. Indeed, it may be laid down as a general statement, that most religious natures shrink from having their experiences scrutinized or debated or discussed by any but those whom they believe to be similarly minded. Where there is the belief that there exist corresponding experiences, the barrier for the most part is broken down, or limited only to minor differences of temperament and habits of thought.

But the conversion, all the while, is known to be revolutionary. It is known to have wrought drastic changes in life's outlook and content. It is believed to involve the whole difference between the service of God and the service of self. But, great as the change is known and felt to be, there is no corresponding feeling of the possession of credentials by which the world can instantaneously recognize the regenerate soul! Indeed, there is no hope of such recognition for the most part. It is the teaching of Jesus Christ that such recognition is not to be looked for because Christians are "not of the world." The common experience of Christians and the teaching of Jesus Christ are here in absolute accord.

Now, then, listen to Professor James's primary approach to the matter of conversion, "Were it true," he says (p. 238), "that a suddenly converted man is, as Edwards says, of an entirely different kind from the natural man, partaking directly of Christ's substance, there surely ought to be some exquisite class mark, some distinctive radiance attaching even to the lowliest specimen of this genus, to which no one of us could remain insensible, and which so far as it went, would prove him more excellent than even the most highly gifted among mere natural men." And then he adds, "But notoriously there is no such radiance.

Converted men as a class are indistinguishable from natural men; some natural men even excel some converted men in their fruits; and no one ignorant of doctrinal theology could guess, by mere every-day inspection of the 'accidents' of the two groups of persons before him, that their substance differed as much as divine differs from human substance." Is there not a very familiar ring to all this? Is there not here exactly the same note which marched along by the side of the cross with thumb on nose, and jeered, "He saved others, himself he cannot save"? Is not this the same tone of mockery which said, "Let us see whether Elijah cometh to save him"? It is the farthest remove from our purpose to attach a stigma to Professor James's attitude toward conversion, especially of the Christian kind; but is not the intellectual and spiritual attitude in these two sets of quotations the same? Is there not the same incredulity, and the same antecedent rejection of the spiritual claim, and the same setting up of false standards which characterized Professor Tyndall's famous prayer test? Are not these things so nearly alike that in spirit, as almost in form, they are indistinguishable? We think every Christian worker who has ever practically dealt with inquirers will recognize the thing at once. It is the same incredulity, the same mocking unwillingness to rejoice with them that rejoice, which has always been one of the greatest crosses for young Christians to bear, and which has driven multitudes of them to break forever with those who ought to have been their natural and joyful allies in their new-found faith. This seeking for a sign, for this is precisely what it is, is itself the "exquisite class mark" of the whole psychological attempt to bring into the foreground for intellectual gymnastics what in its nature cannot be brought into the foreground for such purposes. The scoffing demand for a "radiance" or a halo is the same madness that set Sir Launfal wandering everywhere for the

Holy Grail, while it was within the walls of his own castle. Professor James can lump all kinds of things together on his conversion bargain-counter, just because what he can thus lump and display, lack for the most part the very characteristics which make the real conversion real. In the few paragraphs succeeding the one which we quote, Professor James shows that he feels something of what we have been saying, and tries to qualify it somewhat, but his allusion to the Crumps and Stigginses only accents his utter alienation from the essential movement of a spiritually regenerated life.

Our fathers believed, and we believe, that the evidence of a regenerate spirit is a godly life, and that this witness is the supreme witness. But they did not confine the evidence to this, and would have been wrong so to confine it, in spite of the fact that it opened the gates to the charge that they held that morality was of no particular consequence. That again is an old and familiar form of false approach, namely, that of applying exceptional standards to the men who professed conversion, and of making the contrast between these and others who make no profession at all. Every Christian pastor knows how utterly false and hollow for the most part this habitually urged objection to the religious sincerity of Christians usually is. They do just what Professor James wants done. They want to smite for their own amusement the right cheek of the professing Christian, and then reproach him with lack of Christian forbearance if, in the exercise of a righteous Christian indignation he knocks the insolent brute down. They make a halo standard, and then, because they are not as vile as devils, brag that they are as "good as most Christians." Professor James says just these things, with a more polished vocabulary of course and with more or less infusion of fascinating psychological dressing to delight the intellectual palate; but, by the time it filters down to the

ordinary men with whom Christian pastors have to deal in the protection and building up of the faith of young people, it will be the same coarse brutal demand for a sign which we have always known, and which presumably we shall know to the end. It was not in vain that Christ warned and prepared his followers for precisely this ordeal. They asked of him, also, signs, and halos, and special radiances, and his own generation, being unable to see them, was so enraged by his insistence on his Sonship, that it crucified him. We shall not, very soon at least, improve upon the method of our Lord!

We must linger on this matter just a moment longer, because the crux of all that Professor James has to say on the subject of conversion is right here. Strip the chapters of all their tidbits of fancy work, rhetorical and psychological, this is the practical end that remains for the working minister and his fellow-laborers to deal with. Professor James thinks that there ought to be "some distinctive radiance attaching even to the lowliest specimen of this genus to which no one of us could remain insensible." We have already discussed slightly what the "lowliest specimen of this genus" goes through with when he approaches the world with his recently acquired sense of forgiveness and peace. It is worth while to discuss the other side. Is it a just or a reasonable demand that "no one of us" should be able to remain insensible when such a specimen comes before us? Let us see. Has the world in general honored its prophets before or after it got through stoning them? Has the general crowd "of us" as a rule welcomed with open arms the pioneers of science and philanthropy, or is the pathway over which these have come to their latter glory marked with blood stains from the weary feet and the bruised bodies, bleeding from the heartless flagellations of the mob because there were apparently no distinctive radiances to which "any one of us" could remain insensible?

Just what is the judgment of those who know the history of the world and of human life in general on this point? Is not this suggestion utterly absurd and foolish? And does not such a statement stand outside the whole course of human experience? Have not all the fruits of genius been garnered for us through endless suffering, precisely because there was no radiance? Nay, may we not even go farther and say, that there was oftentimes the radiance there, but the mad mob intent upon its own self-analysis, failed to see it?

The attitude here again is one which shows that the inquiring gaze is turned inward in a way which makes it quite unlikely that, if the newly-made convert had a radiance and halo, Professor James and others like minded would be able to see it! Possibly if even they did see it, the result would be a dissertation on halos with excursions on "radiances" of one kind and another, rather than the recognition of a new spiritual being. To say that when we have an experience which we regard as an illumination from God or a special guidance from the Spirit of God, every sodden wretch in the whole community must be "sensible" of it on the one hand, or that every mind-dissector and psychological analyst shall know all about it on sight, is simply too silly for discussion, and yet this is but a sample of the estimates and interjectory remarks Professor James throws into almost every serious subject which he discusses in this book.

It is therefore quite natural that our author should often find all needful evidences of regeneration "outside of Christianity altogether" as well as in it. But does the reading of the New Testament lead to such a conclusion? We can see how he can hold to the belief and express it that "the mere fact of their transcendancy [i. e., the forces making for conversion] would of itself establish no presumption that they were more divine than diabolical"; that St. Paul's

conversion was a "photism" which was either divine or diabolical, according to the particular estimate which you hold of the Pauline theology, and a variety of other interesting opinions, which, while they form interesting material for just such a discussion as Professor James provides in this book, are no whit illuminating to the great body of Christian believers looking for light in the way of uprightness and truth.

The point of view toward conversion which is here as we think fairly indicated, may be taken as typical whenever any approach is made to the practical aspects of Christianity. Following Professors Coe and Starbuck, Dr. James graciously concedes that the vast majority of those who are converted do show great and overwhelming changes of life, and do give evidence that something very revolutionary has occurred. But, so far as he is concerned, the same thing might be secured through the agency of demons, and Mrs. Baker's "Christian Science" or Alexander Dowie's Zionism stand in a coördinate position with Christianity itself. The judgments of the Christian reader, thoughtfully comparing Professor James's blunders, whenever he approaches the sphere where the practical judgment can be applied, in the actual work of the cure of souls, give an irresistible feeling of insecurity concerning all of his conclusions. If he can be so manifestly at war with what we know to be the facts in the region of ordinary religious discipline, we have the soundest reason for distrusting all the rest. "The Varieties of Religious Experience" will join the great mass of volumes which have excited momentary interest because they came with an air of ponderous promise to help us in a region where we should be grateful to receive light, but which, like most of the rest, simply pass on, leaving us the prior question, not merely not settled, but more urgently pressing because of a new demonstration of science falsely so called.