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**PRAGMATISM, HUMANISM AND PERSONALISM—THE  
NEW PHILOSOPHIC MOVEMENT.\***

BY PRESIDENT E. Y. MULLINS, D. D., LL. D., LOUISVILLE, KY.

I have put the words Pragmatism, Humanism and Personalism in the title of this article, because each of them suggests a phase of the new movement in philosophy which has already attracted wide attention, and will doubtless continue to do so for a long time to come. It is proposed here to give a brief summary of the new philosophy, at least in its more salient features, and afterwards to indicate its significance for religion and theology. In the pursuit of this object we shall employ as a basis for the exposition Professor James' recent work on Pragmatism, Professor Schiller's earlier books on Humanism and Professor Bowne's work on Personalism.

It ought to be said at the outset that in dealing with a philosophy it is first of all the duty of a theologian to understand it, and secondly to judge it from the point of view of its own avowed purpose. In short, he must attempt to sympathize with it as an intellectual construction before passing judgment upon it. It is rather unfortunate for the cause of truth that the opposite method is sometimes pursued. The theological writer sees, or thinks he sees, something in the philosophy he is examining which is opposed to his own point of view, and forthwith denounces it as wholly evil. Philosophers, of course, are often guilty of the same mistake in their attitude towards theology. The result in both cases is to widen the breach between the disputants rather than to advance the cause of truth. One cause of this tendency to misunderstand each other on the part of the philosopher and

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\* *Pragmatism*: By William James. Longmans, Green & Co., New York.

\* *Humanism*: By F. C. S. Schiller. Macmillan & Co., London.

\* *Studies in Humanism*: By F. C. S. Schiller. Macmillan & Co., London.

\* *Personalism*: By B. P. Bowne. Houghton Mifflin & Co., Boston.

theologian is a difference in outlook and aim. The theologian is under the sense of the value of positive truth, of dogma, as a means to the moral and spiritual regeneration of mankind. This is a fundamental and valid attitude of mind. The philosopher on the contrary seeks truth simply. At least the emphasis with him lies here, although all quest for truth must in some sense be practical, must meet some need or supposed need of man, whether religious or otherwise. It would be a great gain if each camp could understand the other better. Both groups of thinkers must assume that all truth is one from the point of view of our human life and needs, although all truths are not equally important. We must take for granted a community of interest in truth, however diverse our attitudes in seeking it, and however distinct our respective tasks in life. The Christian man with his Bible and his revealed Gospel and his moral and spiritual propaganda ought not to fail of sympathy at least, with the thinker who is trying honestly to work out his problem for himself. I am confident that more than half the acrimony and bitterness which have prevailed among theologians on one side and the philosophers and scientific men on the other, has been due to a failure of each to recognize the distinct task of the other. A positive Gospel of redemption finds it hard to endure the reign of the interrogation point. And a passion for truth and the open mind to receive it finds it difficult to tolerate dogmatic assertion in religion. As a matter of fact both habits are incurable, indeed they are necessary. A religion without dogma in some form would be useless for the masses of men, and a philosophy or science which was dominated by false preconceptions might as well abandon their task at the outset. Thus arises the necessity for mutual respect. This does not hinder vigorous discussion and sharp difference of opinion, but it promotes understanding and conduces in the end to harmony of view.

What then is Pragmatism? The term Pragmatism, from the Greek *πράγμα*, meaning action, was first used in philosophy by Mr. Charles Peirce in 1878. The pragmatic method is the application of the practical test for the verification or determination of truth. The pragmatic philosophy does not renounce

interest in ultimate truth. Its votaries seem profoundly interested in all the ultimate problems. It rather seeks to enjoin philosophy from illegitimate and fictitious methods of arriving at truth. Purpose, says pragmatism, enters into all human thinking. We have tended to deify the intellect, as if it could be detached from feeling and willing and purposing. There is no such thing as "pure" thought. Thinking is a means to an end, that is, the satisfaction of our wants and needs. It was not grafted into man by the creator, like a twig from a tree, in order that by it we might fathom the ultimate mysteries of the universe. The intellect has developed in the struggle for life, and its function is to enable us to live and prosper.

Pragmatism, then, renounces the idea that truths are ready made and given to us independent of and apart from our experience. We test and try and verify until truths become valid. Says Prof. James, "As the sciences have developed farther, the notion has gained ground that most, perhaps all, of our laws are only approximations. \* \* So many rival formulations are proposed in all branches of science that investigators have become accustomed to the notion that no theory is absolutely a transcript of reality, but that any one of them may from some point of view be useful. \* \* They are only a man-made language, a conceptual shorthand, as some one calls them, in which we write our reports of nature." (Pragmatism, pp. 56-57). Thus ends scientific "absolutism". Science even does not know everything, and what she thinks she knows she must always be ready to modify if necessary. Surely we should hail with pleasure the return of the grace of intellectual humility to the ranks of science. Professor Schiller insists that our axioms were all originally postulates or hypotheses, intellectual ventures so to speak, which men set up for practical ends and then proceeded to verify them in action. We hold tenaciously to any truth that is practically useful because it has proven itself in experience. Incidentally, I may remark that this method gives us a philosophic and scientific warrant for tradition. Whatever works survives. Its survival is the guarantee, so far, of its validity. The traditionalist, therefore, may raise his head again! He has been the most abused of men.

Now this stock of old truths which we all carry in our intellectual knapsacks must always be reckoned with. A new idea or a new fact enters our experience and disturbs some view previously held. We do not reject the old, or at least, we reject just as little of it as possible. If the new truth or fact is stubborn, and persistent, and clamorous, by and by we open the door and admit it. Thus it guides us, becomes the "instrument" leading us, to a new experience. "Any idea upon which we can ride, so to speak; any idea that will carry us prosperously from any one part of our experience to any other part, linking things satisfactorily, working securely, simplifying, saving labor; is true for just so much, true in so far forth, true instrumentally." (Pragmatism, p. 58). "New truth is always a go-between, a smoother-over of transitions. It marries old opinion to new fact so as ever to show a minimum of jolt, a maximum of continuity." (Page 61). Prof. James goes on to say that the part played by older truths is controlling in Pragmatism. "Their influence is absolutely controlling. Loyalty to them is the first principle—in most cases it is the only principle; for by far the most usual way of handling phenomena so novel that they would make for a serious rearrangement of our preconceptions is to ignore them altogether or to abuse those who bear witness for them." (pp. 61-62). As an example of this pragmatic growth of truth, Professor James cites radium. At first the indefinite quantities of energy apparently given out by radium without its own diminution seemed to overthrow the previous generalization of science known as the conservation of energy. Tradition and conservatism, however, made men tenacious of the old view. When "helium" was discovered as the outcome of radium it afforded relief, because it left the old view of conservation very nearly intact. (Pragmatism, p. 63).

Prof. Schiller gives a convenient series of brief definitions of Pragmatism which will serve as a summary. Truths do not descend into the scientific or philosophic mind ready made from a supercelestial region like birds from the upper air. Truths are established by processes of testing and verification in actual human experience. The problem of error runs

through the verification process. The acceptance of one view is the rejection of its opposite. The first definition of Pragmatism is that (1) "*truths are logical values*", and Pragmatism "systematically tests claims to truth in accordance with this principle." (2) "*The truth of an assertion depends on its application.*" Abstract truths are not fully truths at all. The third definition is (3) "*the meaning of a rule lies in its application.*" A fourth form of statement is (4) "*All meaning depends on purpose.*" The fifth definition explains the fourth, (5) "*All mental life is purposive.*" Thought without purpose is impossible. Abstract systems of philosophy ignore this fact. Pragmatism therefore is (5) "*a systematic protest against all ignoring of the purposiveness of actual knowing.*" Thus conceived Pragmatism may be described as (7) "*a conscious application to epistemology (or logic) of a teleological psychology, which implies, ultimately, a voluntaristic metaphysic.*" (Humanism, pp. 8-12). Pragmatism then is a theory of knowledge. It is, as Professor James says, an attitude rather than a metaphysic, a method of arriving at truth rather than a philosophic system in and of itself. He compares it to a corridor with rooms opening from it on all sides. The various metaphysical systems, monism, idealism, and the rest, are the rooms and Pragmatism is the corridor. Pragmatism tests all the theories by asking and seeking to find out how they work. Its duty is to accept that which ultimately works best.

We consider next and more briefly Humanism. Professor Schiller has published two good-sized volumes on Humanism, and in them is to be found the most exhaustive account of it. Pragmatism and Humanism, however, are simply different aspects of the same general philosophic point of view. Humanism is an enlarged Pragmatism. It reaches back to Protagoras and builds its general conception on his dictum that "man is the measure of all things". It means in brief that all knowledge, in the nature of the case, takes its shape from the mind of the thinker, that all reality in man's thinking is manipulated by human thought into forms which did not previously exist. The materials of thought are sense impressions, the

relations between the objects which convey the impressions, and the previous knowledge in the mind of the thinker. Now every individual re-forms and re-makes reality or truth, so to speak, into his own image and likeness. When we speak of "the man in the moon", for example, we impose on the dark spots of the moon a thought having a human origin. This is the popular way of referring to these spots. A scientific man would describe them in terms of his own interest and purpose. Now both the popular and the scientific view would be true within limits. There is "a man in the moon", as anybody can see by looking. For there are eyes and nose, etc. In any case, the description of the moon would be colored by the mind of the beholder. The man who plants his crops by the light of the moon, and the man who takes medicine only at certain phases of the moon, and the man who sees "a man in the moon" and the astronomer, all alike, re-make the conception of the moon for some human end and purpose. Now Humanism takes this conception and generalizes it. Human interest and human purpose inevitably enter into all the processes of knowing. Philosophies which seek to transcend the concrete realm of human life and experience by abstracting some one element of thought or experience, and constructing its universe on that, inevitably comes to grief. Professor Schiller says: "Humanism is really in itself the simplest of philosophic standpoints: it is merely the perception that the philosophic problem concerns human beings striving to comprehend a world of human experience by the resources of human minds. It demands that man's integral nature shall be used as the whole premiss which philosophy must argue from wholeheartedly, that man's complete satisfaction shall be the conclusion philosophy must aim at, that philosophy shall not cut itself loose from the real problems of life by making initial abstractions which are false, and would not be admirable, even if they were true." (Studies in Humanism, pp. 12 and 13). We see then the relation of Pragmatism to Humanism. Pragmatism is one particular under Humanism. It is the application of Humanism to the theory of knowledge. "If the entire man, if human nature as a whole, be the clue to the theory of all experience, then human

purposiveness must irrigate the arid soil of logic." (Humanism, Preface, p xxi).

The inner meaning of Pragmatism and Humanism as a philosophic movement appears at no point more clearly than in their contrast with the absolute systems of philosophy, idealism, monism and the rest. Its criticism of these systems is trenchant and radical. These attempt the impossible. They are abstract systems which attempt to reconstruct the universe intellectually by means of a mere fragment of experience or of reality. Monism, for example, abstracts the conception of unity, and attempts to exalt it into an exhaustive principle which accounts for all things. The fault with all these systems is their remoteness from the concrete facts and conditions of experience. They are rationalistic systems, not necessarily in the old sense of opposed to religion, but rationalistic in the sense of assuming that abstract human reason is equal to the task of penetrating beneath the world of life and fact as we know it and of discovering the ultimate principle of the universe. In their attempts to attain reality they always get far away from the real. Lotze, for example, reared his monistic system as the result of an attempt to explain causation, or how one thing acts upon another. To explain such action is impossible. Hence Lotze inferred that things are not really separate and distinct. At bottom they are one, not many. This principle of unity is then taken as the ultimate reality—it is called the Absolute—and all the appearances of the many are unreal. They are simply phases of the manifestation of the one eternal and absolute substance.

Now the method of Pragmatism appears clearly in Professor Schiller's reply to Lotze on this point. In brief it is that the monistic problem in philosophy in the absolute sense is not a legitimate problem at all. For the plurality of things and the interaction of things are the condition without which the world could not exist. Without things and their action upon and relations to one another there could be no world. There is, indeed, a unity involved in this interacting quality of things which we must recognize. But then at the same time there is a plurality of things between which the interaction takes place.



Both unity and plurality, then, are facts of the world as we know it. They are "data rather than problems for thought." Each is ultimate for practical purposes here and now. Why then should the philosopher be carried off his feet by the thrilling conception that things are one any more than by the equally thrilling conception that things are many? For Pragmatism the problem of an absolute one or an absolute many is an illegitimate problem, because each one of them attempts to build the world out of an unknown ultimate principle. We do not get anywhere as a datum to start from any one of the absolute principles, whether Matter or Motion, or the One, or the Many, or the Idea, or anything else. These things are all given to us in a concrete world of fact and experience. So soon as any one element of our actual world is abstracted from the rest and made into an exhaustive explanation of the rest, or rather made to cancel all the rest, the thinker soars into a cloudland, where one explanation of the universe is as good as another if not better. Philosophy thus becomes really a repetition of the Greek history of philosophy wherein a succession of acute thinkers propounded a series of brilliant guesses as to the ultimate principle of the universe and in turn devoured each other. From the Humanistic standpoint, then, no one of the absolute systems can either be proved or disproved. They are constructions of a fictitious world by means of words and abstractions upon a nucleus of fact or experience too attenuated and shadowy to afford an explanation of anything. They are as if one should take a single scale from a single fish out of the sea and from the scale alone deduce all the contents of the ocean, instead of exploring it for the facts.

It must be confessed that the assault of Pragmatism upon the absolute systems of philosophy is a terrific one. The theory of knowledge which Pragmatism urges wherein human ends and the human will and a concrete human situation are made to control in the discovery and formation of truth, in a sense in the making of truth, is one which the absolutists will find it difficult to overcome. All readers of the history of philosophy know with what facility systems are built up. And

as we follow Plato, or Spinoza, or Hegel, or Bradley, or the scores of others who might be named, as they carry their imposing systems upward to the clouds we are for the time overpowered, and if their systems incidentally crush the life out of our religious hopes and aspirations we may despair. But when the test of Pragmatism is applied we are reminded of a famous palace and how it was built. When Aladdin was about to marry the princess, you know, he rubbed his magic lamp and the genie of the lamp appeared and, at Aladdin's bidding, in one night built the most magnificent palace the world ever saw, leaving one window partly finished. The father of the princess was asked to complete the window, but he found his whole supply of gems and precious stones, Sultan and ruler as he was, but poor baubles to the gorgeousness and splendor of the jewels already set in the partly built window. Having demonstrated the poverty of the Sultan and the boundless resources of the palace builder the genie completed the window on the proper scale of grandeur, and the owner took up his abode therein with his bride. But, alas, for palaces built in this way. Aladdin's enemy one night got possession of the lamp and in a single night the palace with the bride and all its wealth was removed across the sea while the owner was away. So also the absolute systems of philosophy arise. They are built by the genie of the lamp. They are simple in construction, they are imposing in appearance, they are gorgeous in their appointments, they strike through the observer a sense of his own poverty, they are altogether sublime—but they vanish off the face of the earth as easily as they came. The reason is that they are built of shadow rather than of substance. They are constructions in an unreal world. They are phantom bridges built across the chasm separating the known world from a supposed absolute world.

We next consider the general position of Professor Borden P. Bowne in his recently published and exceedingly interesting volume on *Personalism*. The points held in common by Pragmatism and Personalism will enable us to appreciate better the points of difference.

Personalism in brief is the latest, and as we may say, the

highest stage in the development of philosophic idealism. Like Pragmatism and Humanism, Personalism builds on the facts of our actual world, and rejects the barren abstractions of the absolute philosophies. Like these, again, Personalism takes the individual and personal life of man as its starting point, the highest datum possible for any form of philosophy. With this as its starting point, Personalism, with Pragmatism and Humanism, denies the possibility of reaching ultimate reality by a single leap of abstract thought which ignores many of the facts of the actual world.

So much for the points of agreement. Personalism goes beyond the limits set by Pragmatism. It is bolder in its thought process. It does not limit itself to working principles in the form of postulates which are to be verified in the actual and practical tests of experience, though it starts with these just as Pragmatism does (Personalism, p. 311). Professor Bowne holds that while we are forced to build on experience, on the facts of life, we are at the same time bound to transcend them. Here comes into view his point of departure from the absolute philosophies. Like Hegel and Professor Bradley and others he aims at ultimate reality. But instead of laying hold of a single abstract conception, as Hegel did of the Idea, or as Professor Bradley does of the logical principle of contradiction, Professor Bowne takes the total personal life of man as the key to the universe. His mode of argumentation he calls *transcendental empiricism*. By this he means deducing ultimate truth from empirical facts. Thus he seeks to ground his philosophy on a scientific basis. Three things constitute this empirical basis of his reasoning: first, the coexistence of persons; second, the law of reason valid for all and binding upon all; third, the world of common experience, actual or possible, where we meet in mutual understanding (Personalism, pp. 20-21).

Now this empirical basis of fact needs no proof and cannot be assailed by any form of skepticism which is more than verbal. "With this living, aspiring, hoping, fearing, loving, hating, human-world, with its life and history and hopes and fears and struggles and aspirations, philosophy must begin."

(p. 25). Agnosticism, idealism, nihilism and other forms of philosophy ignore these facts. You cannot explain physical nature on an impersonal plane. Matter does not explain matter. You do not advance one step in explanation so long as you confine your explanation of causes to the mechanical arrangements of nature. You may indeed go backward in an endless regress of terms to explain causality, but you always land substantially where you began. Human volition alone can explain causation. Indeed it is the source of our whole conception of causation. Mr. Bradley finds contradiction in all the phenomena or appearances of the world and deduces therefrom an Absolute in which there is no contradiction. But his absolute remains unknown. Personalism says "the word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth and in thy heart". You seek in vain, for example, for any real and fundamental unity in the plurality of the physical world, but you get a real unity combined with plurality of activity and experience in personal consciousness. You seek in vain for any real and fundamental identity in the mechanical arrangements of the changing world of matter. You do find it in the continuous and unbroken thread of personal human consciousness. Thus Personalism is a philosophy with a real climax. Every philosophy which is constructed by means of a principle taken from the sub-human plane is anti-climactic. Personalism, of course, finds a personal God as the goal of its inquiry. The universe is the universe of persons, not of things. Life is a fellowship of persons, not a play of blind forces. Thus Personalism cancels Agnosticism and Materialism. Thus also it cancels abstract idealism which ignores many of the factors of personality and rears a system on the conception of the Idea or Reason alone. Such an idealism is impersonal and to all intents and purposes equivalent to Materialism.

What, then, is the relation between Personalism on the one side and Pragmatism and Humanism on the other in the matter of deducing a personal God from human personality. Doubtless the representatives of the respective schools of thought would prefer to define this relation themselves rather than have it done by an outsider who is a teacher of theology.

We may, however, venture our opinion. Both schools agree in putting the taboo upon the abstract systems which really arrive nowhere in their speculations. Pragmatism would admit the validity of the postulate of a personal God and insist that the proofs be of a practical nature. These would grow out of the "cash value" of the conception for actual life, its survival value in actual experience. Personalism would insist that by an inevitable gravitation upward, so to speak, of the human reason, we must proceed until we find God, and that the inference or deduction of God from the empirical facts of life is valid. It would repudiate the idea that at any points it breaks with reality and soars into cloudland. Professor Schiller says that the search for reality is like a hard rock climb. The feet and hands of the climbers are clinging to the sides of the cliff constantly. The speculations of the philosophers are like the rope which binds the climbers together. Now if we discriminate the schools of philosophy by means of this illustration we may say the Pragmatists hold that the top of the cliff is enveloped in mist and cannot be seen as yet, though we may divine what is there and adopt it as a working principle. Personalism would assert that reason can penetrate the enveloping mist and discern at least dimly the summit provided its glance is carefully directed along the side of the cliff itself. The Absolutists on the other hand seize the rope which should bind the climbers together, throw it into the air, like the Indian juggler, climb the rope into the upper regions and disappear in the clouds.

As the purpose of this article is exposition rather than criticism we omit any extended criticism. We have seen that Personalism leads directly to Theism, and in a sense it is a mediating philosophy between the absolute systems on the one hand and Pragmatism, which is a method and attitude rather than a philosophy, at least at its present stage of development, on the other. The absolutists are making their counter assaults and doubtless will continue to do so. For the purposes of this article it will be more profitable to give our concluding pages to the moral and religious bearings of Pragmatism.

First of all then Pragmatism adopts an ethical basis for

metaphysics. Its moral earnestness is seen nowhere better than at this point. Ethics or right conduct is the foundation of metaphysics, argues Professor Schiller, because conduct is primary and thought is secondary in human life. Rationalism takes the opposite view and seeks to work out the metaphysical problem first, and says that in putting ethics before metaphysics Professor Schiller puts the cart before the horse. To which Mr. Schiller replies that "nowadays it is no longer impracticable to use a motor car for the removal of a dead horse". By which he means that absolutist metaphysics is a dead horse. We do not understand by this that Mr. Schiller would oppose a theistic postulate as the basis for ethics provided only it be not derived in the absolutist way.

Pragmatism gives a new and striking validity to the principle of faith. Because in our attainment of knowledge we must make assumptions and then verify them practically, and because purpose and ends are integral parts of the process of knowing, it is seen that faith is everywhere implicit in knowledge and not opposed to it. Science, philosophy, and religion, all alike must build on the faith principle.

Pragmatism will not satisfy those of us who believe we have a revelation from God. It everywhere assumes too generally that man can by searching find out God, that philosophy alone can save us, by gradually enabling us to arrive at the knowledge of God. This general assumption defers the realization of human hopes too indefinitely for the practical purposes of life. This very fact, however, reinforces the Christian argument from *antecedent probability* for a revelation. If we live in a personal world and if God and man are free, surely they can communicate with each other and God will not leave man to grope in darkness through the long and tedious ages of speculation. Pragmatism does, however, bring great relief in protecting faith from the metaphysical cliff-climbing and transcendental ballooning of the absolute philosophies, which are subjective and individual and irresponsible, which no man can either prove or disprove world without end.

In spite of its too confident trust in philosophy to work out successfully the problem of man's salvation, Pragmatism leaves

it open to Christianity to show its superiority to all other religions and thereby prove its truth. The evidence is abundant to this effect already in the minds of a vast number. Only we fear that Pragmatists will be hard to convince.

In keeping with its ethical tendencies Pragmatism emphasizes human freedom as against the pantheistic and abstractly idealistic systems. One of the best chapters in *The Studies in Humanism* is the eighteenth wherein the author seeks to overthrow the philosophic and scientific objections to freedom by demonstrating that a limited freedom or indetermination is all that is called for by the facts or man's moral needs, and that such freedom is necessary if we are to resist the onslaught of fatalistic and deterministic science and philosophy. In Pragmatism Professor James carries the conception of freedom to the limit so far as its practical results are concerned. Freedom, he thinks, involves the possibility of permanent and eternal loss. We may absolutely make our own destiny. It seems a little odd to find the doctrine of hell thus given pragmatic sanction. Professor Schiller, however, shrinks from this conclusion and thinks the ultimate optimistic outlook the only finally tenable one. In both these writers we observe that the supreme question of life for all men is "what must I do to be saved?" That is to say man's moral and religious interests are his real interests, the real values of life.

The relation of Pragmatism to Ritschlianism is an interesting point. Professor Schiller once or twice intimates that there is a close relation between the two forms of thought. There is on the practical side. But this scarcely seems true on the metaphysical. Ritschl adopted the Kantian Agnosticism as modified by Lotze, and erected it into a dogma. It is the corner stone of the Ritschlian theology and belongs to the absolutist type of thought. Thus Ritschlianism is not pragmatic at all in its theory of knowledge and fundamental attitude. The "judgment of value" is common to Ritschlianism and Pragmatism, but Ritschlianism excludes entirely the judgment of reality, while Pragmatism assumes it everywhere and works gradually towards ultimate reality. It is thus far stronger than Ritschlianism at this point.

Pragmatism shows close affinity to Christianity in its emphasis upon the value of the highest moral and spiritual ideals, upon immortality and the future life. But as expounded by Professor Schiller in his chapter on *The Desire for Immortality* it fails to do justice to the Christian facts. Here he has a good deal to say about the indifference of society as to the question of immortality, and the brutal manner in which all interest in the mystery of death and the future life is crushed out in society at large. Surely Professor Schiller has overlooked the Christian elements in modern society in this statement of the case. There are great segments of society in America at least, and we must also believe in England, to which Professor Schiller's language does not apply. While we should all rejoice that philosophy is more and more inclined to award to religion its proper place among human interests, yet we cannot but wonder that the distinctive and differentiating facts of Christianity are left so much on one side. Why does not philosophy reckon with these elements of life, these facts of experience, and recognize their unique significance for man's highest aspirations. Christianity above all religions applies the practical test. Christian beliefs work in the actual struggle of men for the highest and best. "He that willeth to do the will of my Father shall know the doctrine," said Jesus. Obedience is indeed the "organ" of knowledge in Christianity. This point Pragmatism is glad to recognize. But it makes a serious mistake in failing to recognize also the peculiar and unique Christian facts which render it a workable religion, and also in attempting to reduce Christianity to a minimum which shall leave it on a par with other forms of religion.

In conclusion we would add that every Christian man should welcome any approach which philosophy makes towards faith in Christ. We believe that Christ is the true answer to all that is best in Pragmatism, and that a candid consideration of what Christianity is in its essential nature would shed a great deal of light on the places which Pragmatism leaves dark. If Pragmatism, in short, would consistently apply its own faith principle to Christ in any adequate way it would indeed introduce a new era in philosophy.



**THE VIRGIN BIRTH OF OUR LORD.**

BY REV. HENRY M. KING, D. D., PROVIDENCE, R. I.

Can we accept the virgin birth of Christ as a fact, and is it an essential part of the Christian system? Attention has been recently called anew to this doctrine, which has been up for discussion ever and anon since the third century of the Christian era, and after every discussion the faith of Christendom has settled back almost universally into the conviction that it can be and must be retained. The exceptions have been comparatively few in number, and have generally gone on to the rejection of all faith in the supernatural, when they have not begun in that rejection. Denial here has seemed like the little leaven which has leavened the whole lump. What are some of the reasons for believing the doctrine of the Virgin Birth of our Lord? This article makes no pretension to a full discussion of the divine mystery. It will only present a few reasons which justify the belief in it.

1. It is primarily a question of the genuineness of the text and the correctness of the interpretation. Of course, those who accept the mythical and legendary theories easily set aside the first chapters of Matthew and Luke, which contain the accounts of Christ's birth, as having no historic basis and as being no part of the Word of God. But careful and intelligent students of the text declare that there is as much reason for retaining these chapters as part of the sacred Scriptures as for retaining any other chapters of the four Gospels.

Moreover, that these accounts of Christ's birth do teach plainly and positively, and in the most chaste and delicate manner, that Jesus was "conceived of the Holy Ghost," and "born of the Virgin Mary," no candid interpreter can question for an instant. If these early chapters are to be retained in the Word of God, then the doctrine of the virgin birth is to be retained in the Christian faith.

But the doctrine does not rest solely upon the teaching of these two Gospels, as is sometimes asserted, with the im-

plication that one or two plain teachings of a truth are not sufficient to warrant its acceptance, if it is an extraordinary truth, but that it must be reaffirmed many times, as is the case with the fact of the resurrection of Christ, in order to command the belief of men. This rule would exclude many important truths of revelation. It may be asked how many times must the Spirit of God say a thing is true before it is true and worthy of confidence. But the doctrine of the virgin birth does not depend, as we shall see, upon one passage or two passages. There are many passages that can be adduced in its support outside of the limits of Matthew and Luke. Matthew alone in his narrative recalls Isaiah's remarkable prophecy, "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel," and distinctly affirms that it was fulfilled in the birth of Jesus.

Turning to other parts of the New Testament we find John evidently referring to the virgin birth of our Lord when he says, "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us" (the Word, who "was in the beginning with God and was God"), and when he calls Christ "the only begotten Son of the Father," language which can mean nothing less than this, that God took upon himself in the birth of Christ human nature, and that that birth was unique, distinct, unlike any other birth. He was the only begotten Son of his Father. He was of divine parentage in an exceptional way. He had God for his Father in a peculiar and solitary manner. It has been often remarked that Christ never says "Our Father," including himself with his disciples. It is always "My Father." The language of John which separates Christ from the whole race of men, does not refer to his exalted character or to his exceptional life, but to the one distinct and definite fact of his birth.

Paul also evidently refers to something remarkable and noteworthy when he says Christ was "made of a woman." There would be no necessity for such a remark about any merely human being or any ordinary human birth. The strikingly remarkable thing is that God should send forth his Son, whom the apostle elsewhere characterizes as "the image of the invisible God, the first born of every creature," to be "made of

a woman," that is, to enter by a process of generation into human nature, while bearing still the likeness, the image, the lineaments of his Father, God. Herein is the uniqueness, the supernaturalness, and at the same time the humiliation of the birth of Christ.

Moreover, Christ's own teaching about himself, properly understood, bears witness to his supernatural birth. He clearly taught his pre-existence when he said, "Before Abraham was I am," and when he spoke of the "glory he had with his Father before the world was". It seems impossible to conceive of a divine pre-existent being coming into this world by a birth, if both parents are human. If Jesus was the son of Joseph and Mary, he could not have been pre-existent. If he was pre-existent, he must have been conceived by the Holy Ghost. A pre-existent personal life which continued to exist in this world, in a human form and in conjunction with human nature, must have been in some mysterious manner the generating principle in the Babe of Bethlehem.

2. But it may be remarked, in the second place, that the question of the virgin birth of our Lord hinges upon the possibility of believing in the supernatural at all. If we deny the supernatural, we of course abandon all faith in the virgin birth of Christ, and also in his resurrection, and in fact, in every miracle of Christ recorded in the Gospels, as well as all faith in his divine character and in the divine origin and authority of the whole Christian system. Christ is brought down to the plane of humanity and Christianity is reduced to the level of a natural product. A naturalistic theory of interpretation destroys every distinctive characteristic of the Christian religion, every thing that has given to it power and progress in the world, every thing that has given to it its remarkable hold upon the faith of men and of nations.

Mr. John Morley has said: "Many of those who have ceased to accept the inspiration of the Scriptures, or the miracles contained in them, or the dogmas into which the churches have hardened the words of Christ, still cling to what is, after all, *the great central miracle of the entire system, after which all others become easily credible—the mystery of the Incarnation*

*of the Supreme.*" Dr. W. Robertson Nicoll comments on these words as follows: "We cordially agree with Mr. Morley that, granting the entrance of the Son of God into human history, granting the miracle of the Incarnation of the Supreme, there is little to cause any difficulty. Without the Incarnation, without the Resurrection, we have no form of religion left to us that will control or serve or comfort mankind. It is the fact of our Lord's deity that gives its meaning to his every action and his every deed." Divinity has come to have a very uncertain meaning. It may mean much or little, according to the intent of the person using it. But deity has a definite signification, and the deity of our Lord can be predicated only on the basis of his virgin birth, that is, the actual incarnation of the Supreme.

The birth of Christ is represented as occurring partly in the order of nature and partly out of the order of nature. The principle of parthenogenesis which is advanced by scientists to-day, may have no probative value; but it serves as an illustration to diminish the incredibility of the virgin birth of Christ. At any rate the virgin birth of Christ is no more incredible than the resurrection of Christ after his death on the cross and burial in Joseph's tomb, a fact which was preached vigorously by the apostles, and has been accepted by Christians of every name throughout the world, as the crowning act of Christ's earthly manifestation and the convincing endorsement of his saving mission, giving authority to his teaching, value to his sacrificial death and the recognition of God to his claims upon the love, obedience and worship of mankind. "He was declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead." And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second Psalm, "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee"; that is, declared or exhibited thee as my begotten Son. Christmas and Easter, as commemorative observances of supernatural facts, stand or fall together.

Again, the virgin birth is no more incredible than the rais-

ing of Lazarus from the dead after he had been in the tomb four days, than the feeding of the five thousand with the five loaves and two small fish, than the walking on the sea, than the curing of congenital blindness, and than the turning of water into wine. To believe in the reality of the supernatural is to bring all these recorded wonders within the bounds of credibility. To say that no amount of human testimony can be sufficient to establish the credibility of a miracle is to pre-judge and summarily to dismiss the whole case.

3. It may be added that the narrative of the birth of Jesus is beautifully consistent throughout. Granted a supernatural birth, and all the attendant circumstances fall into place without a jarring or discordant note—the angelic annunciation and ante-natal naming of the divine Child, the song of the heavenly host, the worship of the shepherds, and the visit and conduct of the eastern wise men. All these things constitute a most charming and consistent story, and if it be only a story of the imagination, it is the most wonderful story that simple, unimaginitive men ever constructed.

Moreover, strongly confirmatory evidence to the truth of the virgin birth of our Lord is found in the obvious fact that it harmonizes perfectly with the entire earthly manifestation of Christ. It prepares the way for what follows and indeed explains it, viz.: the sinless character, the matchless wisdom and recognized authority, the exercise of superhuman power and grace, the atoning death and its extraordinary circumstances, the glorious and triumphant resurrection and ascension to the right hand of God. That birth is the appropriate beginning of the extraordinary middle and the supernatural ending. Each chapter of Christ's biography is in beautiful and absolute harmony with the other chapters. The whole life is a unit in the character it reveals, and in the impression it makes. The personality remains the same from beginning to end, from Bethlehem to Olivet. There are no abrupt surprises which astonish and bewilder us. Dr. R. W. Dale well says, "That Christ should have worked miracles does not surprise me. It would have surprised me if he had not." Accept the virgin birth of our Lord, and what follows is the natural unfolding

of a life thus begun. Deny his virgin birth, and the supernatural becomes not only the unexpected, but the unnatural, the superstructure has no adequate foundation, the massive pyramid has no base on which it rests. What the world has always needed, and what it still needs, is not a partial, a mutilated Christ, but a whole Christ.