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ESSAYS AND ADDRESSES



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PREFATORY REMARKS.

THE Essays and Addresses contained in this volume are arranged with reference to their subject-matter, and not in the order in which they were written or delivered.

I have to thank the publishers of *Time* for permission to reprint the paper on "Social and Individual Reform," and the publishers of *Mind* for permission to reprint the paper on "The Philosophical Importance of a true Theory of Identity." The essay "On the true Conception of another World" formed the introduction to my translation of a portion of Hegel's "Æsthetic," and is now reproduced as throwing some light on the subjects of which the present volume treats. The occasions on which the several addresses were delivered are indicated in footnotes to each of them.

It may be of interest to some readers to know that the Ethical Society, on behalf of which four of the addresses were given, is a small association in London, modelled on the more powerful Ethical Societies of the United States, which have for their object to contribute by precept and in practice to spreading moral ideas and strengthening moral influences on a non-dogmatic basis.

I am well aware that I may incur a charge of presumption by enunciating definite views on certain social problems, without possessing an appreciable fraction of the practical experience which gives weight to the words of such authorities as Mr. and Mrs. Barnett, of Whitechapel. I can only plead that to me, as to others, there comes in various ways a definite though not extensive acquaintance with social facts, while those better instructed than myself are always willing to supply the deficiencies of my limited knowledge. I cannot think that any man with open and attentive eyes, and with confidence in his own impartiality, as based upon a rational view of life, does wrong in uttering the best reflections he can make on the way in which things are going, or the way in which he thinks they should go.

I should feel less diffidence in repelling any similar charge that might be brought on the score of the paper, "How to read the New Testament."

It is true that I have not a wide acquaintance with apologetic literature; but the demand for such an acquaintance as the condition of competence in dealing with these subjects may rest perhaps on a *petitio principii*, depending as it does on an isolation of phenomena which belong *prima facie* to the general province of philosophy and critical history. And the thought will not be entirely banished, that if those who are set down as mere dabblers in apologetic literature were to retort in kind and on their side to erect tests of competence, the tables might conceivably be turned. Moreover, in dealing with a positive question, we have nothing to do with sects and parties. I am not bound to know whether, in reading Reuss or Keim,

I am reading apologists or assailants; these labels have no positive import, and are relative to the ideas of the partizans who assign them. As a matter of fact, so far as the dates and discrepancies of writers are concerned, I could accept without any sacrifice of principle, statements which are to be found in the "Speaker's Commentary."

The three more strictly philosophical papers, V., VI., and IX., offer some considerations respecting the true nature of the "Idealist" revival in Germany and in England. As a return to the human and the concrete, finding its supra-sensuous world in the mind and activities of man, this intellectual impulse has been active amongst other vital forces in the nineteenth century movement. But like every great origination—Christianity is a case in point—it has developed a wealth of conceptions and formulæ which have tended to become hostile to the spirit which generated them, and has thus made foes of friends, and friends of foes. Like Christianity, also, it has produced its effect in spite of misconceptions, and has everywhere carried with it the organic ideas of an enlarged and purified Hellenism.

I will take the freedom to insist a little upon this aspect of the so-called German Idealism, because, owing in a large measure to the abundance and energy of its achievements, which needed for their expression an elaborate philosophical terminology, the enlightened public is hardly, perhaps, aware to how great an extent, as a mere matter of fact, it originated in a human enthusiasm wholly antagonistic to remote Ontology. It is quite true that the form taken by the revolutionary effort was that of transferring ontology and orthodoxy into a sphere

and medium in which they should have real significance, rather than that of making a clean sweep of them altogether. It is impossible to estimate the positive and negative aspects of such a transformation in a few sentences; but I wish to express my conviction, in contrast with the views which underlie certain recent criticisms of Hegel, that the human and vital import of his philosophy is its element of permanent value; and that the recognition of the human spirit as the highest essence of things, which is a stumbling-block to those whose hearts are with the orthodoxy which Hegel revolutionized, is the true and enduring result of the great epoch currently symbolized by his name. I will quote two passages from letters written by Hegel at the age of twenty-five; not that such letters, displaying as they do hesitation on essential matters, can be in any way decisive of controverted points in the philosopher's matured system of thought, but because they are startling illustrations of what, on reviewing the whole matter, I firmly believe to have been his dominant temper and purpose.

HEGEL * TO SCHELLING.

"January, 1795.

" . . . What you tell me of the theological and Kantian march of philosophy at Tübingen causes me no surprise. Orthodoxy cannot be shaken as long as its profession is interwoven with worldly advantage, and bound up with the structure of the State. An interest like this is too strong to be readily surrendered, and has an effect as a whole of which people are

¹ Rosenkranz's "Life of Hegel," p. 66 ff; and Hegel's "Briefe, Herausgegeben von Karl Hegel," p. 11 ff.

hardly aware. While this is so, it has on its side the whole troop—ever the most numerous—of clamorous devotees, void of thought and of higher interests. If a mob like this reads something opposed to their convictions (if one is to do their pedantic jargon the honour of calling it by that name), the truth of which they cannot deny, they will say, 'Yes, I suppose it is true,' and then go to bed, and next morning drink their coffee as if nothing had happened. Besides, they will lay hold of anything that presents itself, which will maintain them in their old routine. But I think it would be interesting to molest, in their ant-like industry, the theologians who are fetching up critical [Kantian] materials to prop their Gothic temple, to whip them out of all their refuges, till they could find no more, and should have to reveal their nakedness before the sun. Still, among the timbers which they drag off the Kantian bonfire in trying to arrest the conflagration of their fabric of dogmas, they will carry home with them some burning embers; they are bringing the terminology into general circulation, and are facilitating the general dispersion of philosophical ideas. I shall do all I can; I am convinced that nothing but perpetual shaking and shocking on all sides gives a chance of any ultimate effect of importance; something will always stick, and every contribution, even if it contains nothing new, has its value as encouraging and reinforcing intercommunication and sympathetic labour. Let us often repeat your appeal, 'We do not mean to be behind.' . . . Our watchword shall be Reason and Freedom, and our rallying-point the invisible Church."

THE SAME TO THE SAME.

April, 1795.

“ . . . From the Kantian system and its final completion I expect a revolution in Germany, starting from principles which are already present, and which only need to be systematised and applied to existing knowledge as a whole. No doubt there will always be an esoteric philosophy, and the idea of God as the absolute Ego will belong to it. In my most recent study of the “Postulates of Practical Reason” [Kant] I had had forebodings of what you plainly expounded to me in your last letter, and what Fichte’s “Grundlage der Wissenschaftslehre” will completely open up to me. The consequences which will issue from these ideas will astonish a good many people. They will be dazzled at this supreme elevation by which man is so greatly exalted; yet why have people been so slow to form a higher estimate of man’s dignity, and to recognise his capacity of freedom, which places him on a par with any spiritual beings? I think that there is no better sign of the times than this, that humanity is represented as so estimable in itself; it is a proof that the halo round the heads of the oppressors and gods of this world is disappearing. The philosophers will prove man’s dignity, the people will learn to feel it, and will—not demand, but—simply appropriate their trampled rights.* Religion and politics have played each other’s game; religion has taught what despotism desired, contempt for the human race, its incapacity for all good, its powerlessness to be anything in its own strength. But with

* Almost the same expressions occur in the fifth of Schiller’s letters on *Æsthetic Education*, which are expressly referred to as a masterpiece in this same letter of Hegel. Hegel continued to consider these letters of Schiller as marking an epoch in the history of philosophy.

the spread of ideas as to how all should be, the nonchalance of respectable people in accepting all as it is, will vanish. . . . I constantly exhort myself out of [Hippel's] 'Lebensläufe,' 'Strive upwards to the sun, my friends, that the welfare of humanity may ripen soon. What matter for the hindering leaves and branches! Struggle through to the sun, and if you are weary, never mind! You will sleep all the better.'"

Now I am convinced that the feeling which blazes out in these letters persisted through Hegel's life as the fusing heat of his system. It is improbable that he was in all respects consistent; and no sensible man, above all, no Hegelian, could suppose that the main work of philosophy, after the lapse of half a century, is to repeat the formulæ in which his views were cast. But I believe that in the papers on philosophical questions which are printed in this volume I have rather understated than overstated the elements by which recent idealism is bound up with the humanising movement of this century, and will consequently affect the future of English philosophy.

BERNARD BOSANQUET.

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