

A Pluralistic Universe

PRAGMATISM has been reproached with failure when tested by its own principle, that of practical results. It has been, say its opponents, so much occupied in trying to define itself and in representing the misconceptions of its critics, that it has done little to justify its existence. That it has stirred up a commotion and made a sharp attack on prevailing systems is not enough, for all the previous philosophical movements which it condemns as logomachies have done the same. In reply to this charge it may be said that the constructive work of modern science has been done by the pragmatic method, tho rarely so designated, and further that the extension of the method into philosophic fields is beginning to show constructive tendencies. As examples may be cited Dewey and Tufts' remarkable textbook of ethics, and Professor James's new volume.* The former, tho revolutionary, is not at all polemical; the latter, tho polemical, yet shows that the author has something more than criticism in mind. In it Professor James shows rather clearly whither his line of thought is leading him. Ideas that appeared as footnotes in his "Varieties of Religious Experience" have developed since into fundamental principles, and we may surmise that some of the incidental remarks in this new volume may in the future prove to have more importance than their present position indicates.

Professor James wastes no time in tilting at dead philosophies like the old materialism and scholastic dualism, but directs his attack at the type of metaphysics dominant today in church and college, that is monism, pantheism and absolute idealism, particularly as expounded by Green, Royce and Bradley. He protests that the conception of the absolute, which seems to them of fundamental importance, serves no useful purpose, religious or intellectual, but in-

volves the thinker in fictitious difficulties and logical contradictions. He prefers a universe in the making, pliable, indeterminate and multiplex, to a static infinite oneness, with purely negative attributes. He claims further that his conception of a finite God, closely in touch and sympathy with human beings, is really more orthodox than an unapproachable and inconceivable absolute, for the former has been the God loved by the devout in all ages, altho the latter may have been in their creeds. Fechner's idea of a world-soul to which all living beings contribute and from which certain gifted individuals may at times draw inspiration, has a strange fascination for Professor James.

The most interesting chapter in the book to many will be that which introduces to the non-professional reader the French philosopher, Henri Bergson, the author of *l'Evolution créatrice* and the leading pragmatist of France if we do not count Poincaré. He would break the chain of intellectualism by a direct denial of the absolute validity of logical concepts. Platonic ideas do not take us nearer to reality, but further away from it. Concepts have a limited use in practical affairs, but cannot be used to establish fundamental theories. They are necessarily limited and inadequate, and therefore lead to logical contradictions, such as the impossibility of motion of which Achilles and the tortoise is the classical illustration. In his "scepticism of the instrument" Bergson rivals H. G. Wells.

Professor James does not in this new volume make an appeal to the people, as he did in his "Pragmatism." It is composed of the Hibbert Lectures, given at Manchester College, Oxford, and addressed to students of the subject. Much of it will therefore be found difficult to follow by those who are not well read in modern philosophy and familiar with the language of the various schools. But Professor James's unconventional manner and touches of personal experience

*A PLURALISTIC UNIVERSE. By William James. New York: Longmans, Green & Co. \$1.50.

render anything he writes of interest to a wide audience. His natural distrust of capitalized words—nobody knows what hidden meaning they may carry into the citadel of thought—shows itself in a strict adherence to lower case for everything except proper nouns. Even proper adjectives are reduced to the ranks. This is in line with the modern movement against capitals, but it looks a little queer to see “bergsonian philosophy,” “hegelian method” and “german history.”