

**LIFE IN THE MAKING: AN
APPROACH TO RELIGION
THROUGH THE METHOD OF
MODERN PRAGMATISM**

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Life in the Making: An Approach to Religion through the Method of Modern Pragmatism by
Loren B. Macdonald

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BY
LOREN B. MACDONALD

"Man as yet is being made, and ere the crowning Age of ages,
Shall not soon after soon pass and touch him into shape?"
Tennyson.



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FOREWORD

That religion bears some message of supreme value to human life is an assumption, more or less explicit, in all the great historic faiths. It has been taken for granted that, in some way or other, man's life on earth is safer, worthier, happier with religion than without it. All the more unfortunate it seems, therefore, that this desirable treasure should have been offered to man at the price of an intellectual sacrifice which he is sometimes not willing to make. Must the only entrance to a temple so beautiful and inspiring always be that of some difficult creed or doctrine? Shall man forever be expected to perform some strenuous, and to many, impossible, mental feats in the form of belief and assent before he can enter in and enjoy its harmonies? He is not called upon to yield that intellectual tribute at the shrine of other great emotional or spiritual interests. Art and music, for instance, do not demand any humiliation on the part of reason and intelligence before they come with their blessed ministry to human needs. Why should not the religious interest, supposed to be of far more significance to life than these, offer its ministry on terms equally acceptable?

To all who are concerned in the answer to these questions the message of this book is earnestly and respectfully addressed. There is a large and

increasing number of high-minded and thoughtful men and women to-day who have turned away from the temple of religion, not because of any perversity of will or spiritual incapacity, but simply because they could not subscribe to the dogmas imposed without sacrificing their sense of intellectual integrity. Among those thus repelled there must be many who have some sense of regret and sadness at the necessity of such an estrangement. They have wondered vaguely, it may be, if there was not some way of admission to the hopes and inspirations of religion other than that of dogma. They have dreamed, perhaps, of some road to the largest religious possibilities of life so natural and reasonable that the wayfaring man, though a rationalist and a lover of truth, may not err therein. Is there any possible method, they have said, through which, if religion must make its intellectual demands, it can be made to impose them at the end rather than at the beginning of its ministry? Can religion, with all its practical stimulus and uplift come first, and theology, with its difficult intellectual problems, come afterward?

It may be interesting to those who thus turn yearningly and inquiringly toward a temple from which they are excluded to learn that a new method, or rather the revival of an old method under a new name, has recently been introduced into the schools of philosophy. This novel approach to philosophic truth is sometimes desig-

nated by the word "humanism," more frequently by the less familiar term "pragmatism." The "pragmatic," or "practical" principle in philosophy is a mode of discovering truth, and a test of its validity, with reference to active and living values. It calls upon all metaphysical ideas and doctrines to give an account of themselves by showing that they serve some useful purpose in response to living needs. If the ideas of the Absolute, for example, or the metaphysical conception of Substance, may be held or not held without making any appreciable difference in the direction or meaning of life, then they correspond to no reality whatever, and may be just as well dropped out of the human mind. All truth, pragmatism declares, must in some way be verifiable by experience. A conception that does not work—that is, that does not to some degree modify our experience—is either not true, or is a conception the truth or falsehood of which can never be discovered. Pragmatism in philosophy, therefore, would insist that all truth can be stated in terms of life. And this new philosophical departure is audacious enough to affirm that all the great a priori and speculative doctrines of philosophy which have held sway over the human mind for ages must either be verified by some aspect of human experience, or else resign the authority which they have hitherto held over human thought.

It is evident that the thorough-going applica-

tion of this pragmatic principle to religion would create some disturbance among its well-established and time-honored tenets. It would shatter many idols of doctrine. It would lay irreverent hands on many a sacred structure of creed whose only excuse for being is that it has come down to us from the past. It would demand their credentials in terms of life from many a dogma or institution whose chief office now is to serve as a bar to human progress. On the other hand this search for a living truth in religion would earnestly and sympathetically trace out the vital and essential elements in all the varied forms of religious belief. It might reveal even in over-belief and error some values for life that would justify their existence. Best of all, the introduction of this pragmatic principle into the world of religious thought and endeavor would present a free admission to all into the sacred enclosure. No intellectual statement, not even the simplest or most fundamental, would any longer be a condition of entrance into the religious fold. In place of this would come the nobler and more inspiring challenge to action. The whole wide field of possible experience, it would be said, is open to you; are you willing to enter and test some of its claims and prospects? Are you willing to try some experiments in the high art of living? You are asked to believe only that the possibilities of human life on this earth have not yet been exhausted. You are required to have faith only