

# **THE SOCIAL BASIS OF RELIGION**

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The social basis of religion by Simon N. Patten

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THE  
SOCIAL BASIS OF RELIGION

BY

SIMON N. PATTEN, Ph.D., LL.D.

PROFESSOR OF POLITICAL ECONOMY, UNIVERSITY  
OF PENNSYLVANIA

AUTHOR OF "THE NEW BASIS OF CIVILIZATION," ETC.

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## PREFACE

I BEGAN writing this book with a simple plan, which was the welding together of the ideas acquired in two earlier fields of work. My "Development of English Thought" was an endeavor to create an economic interpretation of history. This, carried to its legitimate consequences, would afford the objective basis of social progress. I had written also in the field of social psychology. From this a subjective view of these same facts is derived. Religion seemed to me to be the point of union between these isolated views. I thought to use the economic interpretation of history to explain the degenerate tendencies in civilization, and then to employ social psychology to set forth the opposing forces of regeneration. To put this in another way: Degeneration is objective and economic, while regeneration is psychic and personal. This conforms to the views held by religious reformers, and, if correct, gives a firm basis to religious thought. Religion is by this means given a scientific foundation and its doctrines are transferred from the traditional basis to the realm of social science.

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On this plan I began to write, and I hope I have not departed from it. There was, however, a break in the process which to some degree modified my plan. After I had written several chapters, a review called my attention to the books of the late much lamented William James. I was influenced by his view of pragmatism, not that it seemed new, but that it was a better expression of a view towards which economists like myself were struggling, but into which they have never clearly come. Professor James, I said, is a philosopher turning towards economics: I am an economist on the road to philosophy; the two seemingly different views should blend and make one truth. Animated by this thought, I wrote several chapters restating pragmatism from a social viewpoint. But in the end I cut out these chapters. I could not enter into a full discussion of pragmatism without turning my book from one on religion into one on philosophy. Tempting as it is to make this transition, the need of clear religious thought seemed too great to permit such a modification of my plan. Now, however, that the book is written, it will help the reader to understand my thought if I contrast it with the well-known views of Professor James. Our likenesses and differences are of such a nature that this can be done without entering into the general discussion that would be necessary if there were not a common

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basis for our views. Professor James, in a touching way, dedicates his "Pragmatism" to John Stuart Mill. I have frequently taken a similar attitude, and I feel that no honor would be greater than to be one of Mill's disciples. From this common ground both Professor James and I have gone forth. Each has tried to interpret events in the manner and from the premises that Mill would have employed. Two men may, however, have a common master and yet move forward in different directions. How this has happened in the present case can be illustrated by starting with a restatement of Mill's position on the points involved.

To understand Mill demands a study of his "Logic," the place where his views are most fully presented. He there tries to prove universal laws from general inductive experience. This method is the same as that of Professor James who, in his radical empiricism, has the authority of Mill on his side. But a disciple has the right to appeal from this to Mill's subsequent attitude and to the later development of the social sciences. The purpose of the "Logic" was to strengthen social reasoning, and it is by this test that it should be judged. Even while writing the "Logic," a change of opinion came over Mill as to the nature of social proof. This was due to the influence of Comte, by which he was led to put universal historical proofs in the place of