EXPERIENCE: A CHAPTER OF PROLEGOMENA, PP. 7-62

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WILFRID RICHMOND

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EXPERIENCE

A CHAPTER OF PROLEGOMENA

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BY THE REV.
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PREFACE

PHILOSOPHY needs no Prolegomena. Experience, the experience of common life, is its beginning. And the more directly it can go back to this common ground of fact from which all philosophies draw their life, the better its chance of arriving at the universal fact which is the truth.

But philosophy now finds the testimony of experience discredited. Its endeavour is futile, unless the credit of its source is re-established. The current doctrine taught is that whatever else experience may afford to us, it cannot give us the knowledge of reality. The purpose, then, of this "Chapter of Prolegomena" is to deal with this initial obstacle to the progress of philosophy, the doctrine that we cannot know.

Short as it is, I could have wished to make it shorter. The first section, "Feeling," contains the argument which alone justifies the publication of this book—the argument to show that the question, "Can we know reality?" is not met with an initial "No." The two subsequent sections were added because it was judged that the main argument, in defence of the possibility of the attainment of

speculative truth, would be more intelligible if some slight indication were given as to the philosophy to which this argument is a preface. They are no more than sign-posts, showing the direction of future logical and metaphysical work.

This will account, in Section II., for the summary treatment of many logical questions and the apparent neglect of others. To take a single instance, it is assumed without discussion that the normal import of the logical judgment is to make an assertion as to the primary, not the ultimate, reality.

And Section III. is, I fear, still more allusive. On the subjects there hinted at, the analysis of the idea of personality, and the interdependence of the various faculties of personal experience, I hope shortly to have more to say.

I would only add one word on the use of the term "Agnosticism." I have attacked under that name the definite philosophical doctrine that we cannot know reality. But I would not be supposed to undervalue the intellectual humility which is the really vital element in the Agnostic creed, a temper accidentally associated with the doctrine that we cannot know, but, as I believe, more truly justified by the rationalist belief that we can know the length and breadth and depth and height of that which passes knowledge.

I.

FEELING

EXPERIENCE

1. PHILOSOPHY is the desire for reality. We live, the mass of mankind, in a world of realities. We are familiar with real things; we have intercourse with real persons. What is reality? What do we mean by real? Can we find a common element of reality running through all these various realities? Can we gather them all into one, a whole of reality? Can we range them under some one dominant reality? The philosopher has gained his desire only when, in answer to these questions, he believes himself to know the supreme pervading reality of the universe with the same intimate certainty with which we all seem to know the multitudinous realities of ordinary life.

Philosophy asks the question, What is the reality of the world?