

## VI.—CRITICAL NOTICES.

*Henry Sidgwick.* A Memoir by A. S. and E. M. S. London : Macmillan & Co., 1906. Pp. 646.

*Memoir of Thomas Hill Green,* Late Fellow of Balliol College, Oxford, and Whyte's Professor of Moral Philosophy in the University of Oxford. By R. L. NETTLESHIP, with a short Preface specially written for this edition by Mrs. T. H. Green. Pp. vii, 259. London : Longmans, Green & Co., 1906.

THE Memoir of Henry Sidgwick published by his wife and brother is in the main a personal record, and the pages of MIND are not the place in which to dwell on the biographical facts of a quiet and uneventful life, or even on the beautiful and simple character which the Memoir partially reveals to those who were not brought within the charm of his 'sunny personality'. But a philosophical periodical may fitly inquire what light these more private records throw upon the growth of Sidgwick's ideas and the influences which went to shape his thought. What were the intimate convictions and preoccupying questions which lay behind his published work and which only occasionally make themselves felt in the course of its impartial discussion and carefully measured pronouncements?

In a short (too short) autobiographical fragment, dictated about a fortnight before his death, Sidgwick speaks of the central and fundamental aim of his life as having been "the solution, or contribution to the solution, of the deepest problems of human life"; and he adds, "the peculiarity of my career has been that I have sought light on these problems, and that not casually but systematically and laboriously, from very various sources and by very diverse methods". Few, indeed, have ever fulfilled so well Berkeley's injunction to the philosopher not to be content with "a little ardour in the early time of life," but to "dedicate his age as well as youth, the later growth as well as first fruits, at the altar of Truth". Intense intellectual curiosity is mentioned as the chief mark of the boy, and an old friend, writing of him as an undergraduate, puts down as "his first and supreme characteristic, candour. It seemed to me then, as it does now, something morally beautiful and surprising; it dominated and coloured his other great qualities—those of subtlety, memory, boldness." Every one who knew Sidgwick, every one who has read his books, will recognise at once the truth of these words.

Perfect intellectual candour is not without its drawbacks or at least its besetting dangers, and some may be inclined to sympathise with Leslie Stephen's complaint (in his warm tribute at the Memorial meeting in Cambridge) that "if possible Sidgwick carried his love of fair play rather to excess; in his speculations he saw too completely the force of the opposite side". Sidgwick himself, in one of his keen passages of self-analysis, touches the defect as well as the charm of his own quality. "I think," he says in a letter of 1866, "I have more knowledge of what the thoughts of men have been, and a less conscious faculty of choosing the true and refusing the false among them. I wonder whether I shall remain a boy all my life in this respect. I do not say this paradoxically, but having John Grote in my mind, who certainly retained, with the freshness, the indecisiveness of youth till the day of his death." But there was something very beautiful in Sidgwick's open-mindedness, in the freshness of which he speaks, in his unending search for light. At the meeting already referred to Dr. Gore in a speech of deep feeling commented on this characteristic—the perpetual hopefulness of his inquiry. "He always seemed to expect that some new turn of argument, some new phase of thought, might arise and put a new aspect upon the intellectual scenery, or give a new weight in the balance of argument.<sup>1</sup> There was in him an extraordinary belief in *following reason*—a belief and a hopefulness which continued up to the last. This is, I venture to think, a quality which is exceedingly rare in our time, for mostly when we have settled down to our positions, we lose any real hope of obtaining any strikingly new light on the deepest matters. It was quite otherwise with Sidgwick. Although, no doubt, you felt that the dominant quality of his mind was sceptical . . . yet it was profoundly different from ordinary scepticism; for it was inspired by a fundamental belief in the attainableness of positive truth. At the bottom of his mind was the profound desire to find an adequate basis on which to rest a positive construction of a worthy life."

When Sidgwick's mind first opened to philosophical questions, Mill's influence was at its height. "No one thinker, so far as I know," he says in the autobiographical fragment already quoted, "has ever had anything like equal influence in the forty years or so that have elapsed since Mill's domination began to weaken." So we find him about 1859 or 1860 beginning a systematic study of Mill's works, acquiring at the same time a mastery of political economy, and devoting a good deal of thought to practical questions, social and political. In another passage of reminiscence he describes "the ideal which became dominant in his mind in the early sixties," primarily under Mill's influence, but partly under the influence of

<sup>1</sup> Sidgwick himself refers, in a letter of 1873, to "a peculiar hallucination under which I labour that I shall suddenly find my ideas cleared up—say the day after to-morrow—on the subjects over which I brood heavily" (p. 277).

“Comte seen through Mill’s spectacles” : “It had two aspects, one social and the other philosophical or theological. What we aimed at from a social point of view was a complete revision of human relations, political, moral, and economic, in the light of science directed by comprehension and impartial sympathy; and an unsparing reform of whatever, in the judgment of science, was pronounced to be not conducive to the general happiness. This social science must, of course, have historical knowledge as a basis; but, being science, it must regard the unscientific beliefs, moral or political, of past ages as altogether wrong—at least in respect of the method of their attainment, and the grounds on which they were accepted. . . . As regards theology, those with whom I sympathised had no close agreement in conclusions—their views varied from pure positivism to the ‘Neo-christianity’ of the Essayists and Reviewers; and my own opinions were for many years unsettled and widely fluctuating. What was fixed and unalterable and accepted by us all was the necessity and duty of examining the evidence for historical Christianity with strict scientific impartiality.” By way of facing this duty Sidgwick devoted the greater part of his spare time for about three years to the study of Arabic and Hebrew literature and history, under the conviction that “it was impossible really to understand at first hand Christianity as a historical religion without penetrating more deeply the mind of the Hebrews and of the Semitic stock from which they sprang”. The fact is characteristic of Sidgwick’s conscientious desire, on every question, to do justice to all the evidence. Not less characteristic is his “secret conviction that the great use of learning Hebrew is to ascertain how little depends on it” (p. 89). Before the beginning of 1865 he had finally abandoned his oriental studies, and was turning to philosophy as a more direct source of light on his religious difficulties. As early as 1862 we find him “revolving a Theory of Ethics”. “I think I see a reconciliation between the moral sense and utilitarian theories” (p. 75). In 1864 he has been setting to work on a book that was to be called ‘Eudæmonism Restated’. This is, of course, the *Methods of Ethics*, eventually published in December, 1874. The different influences which led to the writing of the book and to the precise formulation of the author’s theory have been detailed by Sidgwick himself in the lecture-sketch prefixed to the posthumous edition, and the Memoir adds no further information. It shows Sidgwick, however, wrestling with German philosophy in 1866 and again in 1870. In 1866 Fichte seems to him “absolutely devoid of judgment” and he is “coming more and more to the opinion that the whole ‘Identitätsphilosophie’ (Fichte, Schelling and Hegel) is a monstrous mistake, and that we must go back to Kant and begin again from him”. “Not,” he adds, “that I feel prepared to call myself a Kantian, but I shall always look on him as one of my teachers.” He has parted company with Mill, he feels, for ever, and he thinks that “the best motto for a true Metaphysic are those two lines of Shelley:—

I am the eye with which the Universe  
Beholds itself, and knows itself divine".

This might be claimed as an eminently Hegelian utterance, but it is not till 1870 that we find him trying to settle accounts with Hegel, forced thereto, as he candidly says, rather by "a sense of professional duty than any natural instinct". "Day after day," he writes from Berlin in the midst of the Franco-German war, "I sit down to my books with a firm determination to master the German Heraclitus, and as regularly I depart to my Mittagessen with a sense of hopeless defeat. No difficulty of any other writer can convey the least conception even of the sort of difficulty that I find in Hegel. My only consolation is that every other sort of philosophical work I take up seems easy. But no amount of difficulty alone would distress my spirit, if there was not added the paralysing doubt whether, after all, I am not breaking my head over highly profound nonsense." After some weeks of the struggle he records his determination to read no more of it. "The *method* seems to me a mistake, and therefore the system a ruin; there may be 'gold to be dug there,' as Carlyle says, but I have no time to dig for it among the scoriae." And yet the admissions he makes would go far to satisfy most of those who have learned in Hegel's school. "There are some great broad truths, independent of the method, and lying safe at the base of the system; with Hegel's intense grasp of these I sympathise strongly, and to it I attribute the success of his philosophy, *e.g.*, generally speaking, the reaction from the formalism, phenomenalism, ultra-subjectivism of Kant. That the Universe is essentially and fundamentally rational; the laws of the subject and the object harmonious; history the evolution of the human spirit, etc., etc.—all this is well enough. And I do not say that the science of metaphysics will not ultimately be constructed in the way that Hegel tried to construct it, by patiently thinking out the meaning of our most general and fundamental notions and their relation to each other." But though he does this justice to the spirit and intention of the Hegelian philosophy, he had no natural affinity with its speculative sweep. He describes the system of his own to which he was feeling his way in 1866 as "founded on a union between Brown and Hamilton, with an intermixture of Kant and Ferrier". "My fundamental position," he writes to Roden Noel, "is much what it was in summer—that fundamental dualism which seems to you so unphilosophical." This dualism reappears in his strictures on "Mentalism," in his lectures on "Philosophy, its Scope and Relations"; and his sympathetic lecture on Reid towards the close of his life shows that philosophy meant to him very much what it meant to the Scottish philosophers. His lectures on Kant, incisive as they are at points in dealing with individual arguments and positions advanced by Kant, make the impression of criticisms from the outside by one who had never appreciated the central thoughts of Kant on which Idealism builds.

To Sidgwick as to Lotze, with whom he had temperamentally a good deal in common, the problem of philosophy presented itself as the "reconciliation of spiritual needs with intellectual principles" (p. 75). For some years after the difficulties of historical Christianity began to press upon him his mood was in his own phrase that of one 'hungering and thirsting after orthodoxy'. "I have vowed," he writes in 1862, "that it shall not be for want of profound and devoted study if I do not become a Christian." "But I am firm," he adds, "not to barter my intellectual birthright for a mess of mystical pottage" (pp. 82 and 90). After a series of oscillations between Broad Churchism and a vague Theism he was able to say at the end of 1864 that he had definitely "freed his innermost conscience from the thralldom of a historical belief," and he never swerved from this position, although his personal relation to the traditional faith occupied his thoughts a good deal till the resignation of his Fellowship in 1869. "For many years," he says in 1880, "I have not thought of Christianity except as the creed of my friends and fellow-countrymen." But he considered it to the end as an all but indispensable support of theistic or optimistic faith for the mass of mankind (pp. 357, 508), specially in view of 'the Christian hope of happy immortality'. Hence his prevailing mood is the one he describes on the return from a visit to his brother-in-law, Archbishop Benson, at Addington in 1866: "I find that I grow more and more, on the one hand, to regard Christianity as indispensable and irreplaceable—looking at it from a sociological point of view—and on the other hand to find it more and more incomprehensible how any one whom I feel to be really akin to myself in intellectual habits and culture can possibly find his religion in it". It is interesting to note, however, that while he considers Christianity indispensable in the present state of the world, he is "not prepared to say that this will be equally true some centuries hence; in fact I see strong ground for believing that it will *not* be equally true, since the tendency of development has certainly been to make human beings more sympathetic; and the more sympathetic they become, the more likely it seems to me that the results of their actions on other human beings (including remote posterity) will supply adequate motives to goodness of conduct, and render the expectation of personal immortality less important from this point of view" (p. 357, in letter to J. R. Mozley, 1881). And in a paper on Authority, read to the Synthetic Society in 1899, one of the last things he wrote, he returns to the possibility of "untheological morality," that is, morality unsupported by theological beliefs or sanctions. Many would be inclined to consider the cases which occur of high morality unsupported by such conditions as purely exceptional, but this Sidgwick is not prepared to admit. "The difficulty that I find is in convincing myself that this untheological morality is really abnormal, and does not rather represent the beginnings of a more advanced stage in the development of the moral consciousness. It

seems to me a tenable view that the development of scientific sociology and of social sentiment in average men tends ultimately to disconnect morality from its present theological scaffolding, and exhibit it as simply the outcome of social feeling, guided by a rational forecast of social consequences" (p. 615).

But while Sidgwick had personally discarded Christianity as a historical system, he clung tenaciously to some form of theistic belief. In 1862 he defines Theism as the contemplation of "a Heart and Mind behind phenomena". He finds "no sort of proof against" this hypothesis and it "answers to a need" of his own nature, while "the experience of thousands testifies that such contemplation generates an abiding *ἔθουσιασμός*, with all its attendant noblenesses and raptures". In 1870, although he "can neither adequately rationalise faith, nor reconcile faith and reason, nor suppress reason," he knows that his "true self is a Theist". In 1891 he refers to Theism as "the belief that there is a sympathetic soul of the Universe that intends the welfare of each particular human being and is guiding all the events of his life for his good," and a few years later, in a letter on *In Memoriam*, after quoting the concluding stanzas of Section 124, he writes: "These lines I can never read without tears. I feel in them the indestructible and inalienable minimum of faith which humanity cannot give up, because it is necessary for life; and which I know that I, at least so far as the man in me is deeper than the methodical thinker, cannot give up" (p. 541). He talks frequently of his "Optimism" and refers once to his "idealism" which "the cold corrosive scepticism," to which he is subject as a thinker, is somehow powerless to affect (p. 283). There can be no doubt, therefore, as to the cast of his personal *Weltanschauung*. But when the methodical thinker speaks, and the question of proof is uppermost, the answer is more balanced. "If I am asked whether I believe in a God," he writes in 1880, "I should really have to say that I do not know—that is, I do not know whether I *believe* or merely *hope* that there is a moral order in this universe that we know, a supreme principle of Wisdom and Benevolence, guiding all things to good ends, and to the happiness of the good. I certainly *hope* that this is so, but I do not think it capable of being *proved*. All I can say is that no opposed explanation of the origin of the cosmos—for instance the atomistic explanation—seems to me even plausible, and that I cannot accept life on any other terms, or construct a rational system of my own conduct except on the basis of this faith. . . . Duty is to me as real a thing as the physical world, though it is not apprehended in the same way; but all my apparent knowledge of duty falls into chaos if my belief in the moral government of the world is conceived to be withdrawn. Well, I cannot reconcile myself to disbelief in duty; in fact, if I did, I should feel that the last barrier between me and complete philosophical scepticism, or disbelief in truth altogether, was broken down. Therefore I sometimes say to myself 'I believe

in God'; while sometimes again, I can say no more than 'I hope this belief is true, and I must and will act as if it was' " (pp. 347-48).

All students of Sidgwick are familiar with this position which is essentially the solution of the 'dualism of the practical reason' put forward tentatively in the concluding paragraphs of the *Methods of Ethics*. Without some datum beyond experience, he had written in 1874, in the first edition, "the cosmos of Duty is reduced to a Chaos". The wording of these paragraphs was subjected to a good deal of modification in successive editions, but to the end we find him dwelling on "the vital need that our Practical Reason feels of proving or postulating this connexion of Virtue and self-interest, if it is to be made consistent with itself" (sixth edition, p. 506), and the position obviously bears a close resemblance to Kant's doctrine of God as a postulate of the practical reason. Many would maintain, as Dr. Rashdall, for example, has recently urged, that the supposed dualism is entirely owing to Sidgwick's purely hedonistic conception of the Good. If the pursuit of universal good is once recognised as my reasonable duty, then the reasonableness of that duty cannot depend on its turning out that my obedience has brought me personally more pleasure than pain. "How can it be reasonable," says Dr. Rashdall, "to take the point of view of the part when once the man knows the existence of the whole, and admits that the whole is more important than the part? Must not the point of view of the whole be the one and only reasonable point of view?" (*Theory of Good and Evil*, i., 56). While transcending egoistic hedonism through his acceptance of the axiom of universal Benevolence, Sidgwick, in emphasising this dualism, harks back to the very position he had abandoned. Having accepted the good of the whole as the only ultimately reasonable ethical end, he seems to turn round and refuse to admit its reasonableness unless it can further justify itself as the most pleasurable course for the individual. But this is to fail to maintain himself at the ethical point of view. As a matter of fact, the moral consciousness neither asks nor gets its wages in the hedonistic currency: and the passages already quoted on "untheological morality" and the growth of the sympathetic feelings are evidence that as time went on Sidgwick himself was inclined to lay less stress on this dualism and less stress therefore on the theistic postulate, at least as conceived in Kant's sense and for Kant's purposes. The theological or metaphysical postulate becomes rather the belief in a moral order of the universe than belief in a Person regulating that order. The two forms of expression are frequently used by him alternately,<sup>1</sup> and in a letter to J. A. Symonds, written in 1886 at a time when he says his mind has been "obstinately and latently occupied with the fundamental question of the relation of morality," he says, "I tend to the view that the question of Per-

<sup>1</sup> *E.g.* in the passage quoted above (p. 347), or again (p. 560) where he speaks, in 1898, of "the need of Theism—or at least some doctrine establishing the moral order of the world".

sonality, the point on which the theist as such differs from the atheist, is of no fundamental ethical importance. The question is *what* is the order of the Cosmos, not whether it is a consciously planned order" (p. 455).

There is another important point on which I think we may note a change in Sidgwick's attitude in the later years of his life—I mean the question of the nature of proof. He started with the old ideal of "conclusions logically inferred from self-evident principles," but, unconsciously influenced perhaps by the central Kantian idea of 'transcendental deduction'—proof from the possibility of experience—and by the debates which arose round Mr. Balfour's *Foundations of Belief*, he refers in the concluding paragraph of the last edition of the *Methods* to the analogy of physical science and suggests (without absolutely committing himself to) the new criterion of the truth of any propositions, "that they are indispensable to the systematic coherence of our beliefs". The same parallel is more elaborately drawn in a paper 'On the Nature of the Evidence for Theism' read to the Synthetic Society in 1898 and printed as an appendix to the Memoir. In this paper he definitely refuses to admit "that verification by particular experiences and cogent demonstration from incontrovertible premises are the only modes of attaining the kind and degree of certitude which we require for a working philosophy of religious belief". "The more we examine the process of change in what is commonly accepted as knowledge, the more we find that the notion of 'verification by experience'—in the sense of 'verification by particular sense-perceptions'—is inadequate to explain or justify it. The criterion that we find really decisive, in case after case, is not any particular new sense-perception or group of sense-perceptions, but consistency with an elaborate and complex system of beliefs, in which the results of an indefinite number of perceptions and influences are combined." Hence he concludes that "if we are led to accept Theism as being, more than any other view of the Universe, consistent with, and calculated to impart a clear consistency to, the whole body of what we commonly agree to take for knowledge—including knowledge of right and wrong—we accept it on grounds analogous to those on which important scientific conclusions have been accepted" (p. 607). In an essay on 'Criteria of Truth and Error' (in *MIND*, January, 1900) he reviewed the Cartesian and the Empirical Criterion as well as Spencer's Universal Postulate, promising in a later article to deal with the problem more positively. The outline of a lecture on the Verification of Beliefs containing the substance of this unwritten article is printed as an appendix to the volume on 'The Philosophy of Kant and other Essays'. There we find him distinguishing three modes of verification. (1) The Intuitive or Cartesian, (2) what he calls the Discursive verification and (3) the Social or Œcumenical verification, most obviously illustrated by the consensus of experts. The second of these is the appeal to 'system and coherence,' and



Sidgwick concludes his sketch by saying : " I do not put these on a par. Indeed, it will be evident from the very words used that the second is of special and pre-eminent importance. For the ideal aim of philosophy is systematisation—the exhibition of system and coherence in a mass of beliefs which, as presented by Common Sense, are wanting therein. But the special characteristic of *my* philosophy," he somewhat curiously adds, " is to keep the importance of the others in view." Such passages seem to me to indicate an approximation on Sidgwick's part towards the general theory of knowledge held by contemporary Idealism.

The contrast between Sidgwick and T. H. Green is a striking study in temperamental differences. The contrast is suggested by the reissue in separate form of Nettleship's Memoir, which has hitherto been imbedded, and somewhat lost, in the Collected Works. There are also some interesting references to Green in Sidgwick's Memoir, notably the humorous account of Prof. Marshall's faithful dealing with his friend : " He contrasted my lecture-room, in which a handful of men are taking down what they regard as useful for examination, with that of Green, in which a hundred men—half of them B.A.'s—ignoring examinations, were wont to hang on the lips of the man who was sincerely anxious to teach them the truth about the universe and human life " (p. 394). In another passage Sidgwick himself half-sorrowfully admits the element of truth in this disadvantageous comparison : " I have been busy lately reviewing Green's posthumous book—*Prolegomena to Ethics*. I read it twice over carefully : the first time much impressed with its ethical force and persuasiveness : the second time unable to resist the conviction that my intellect could not put it together into a coherent whole—in fact that it would not do—and yet that probably it was better that young men should be believers in it than in anything I can teach them " (p. 380). " There is nothing in me of prophet or apostle," he says again in a strain of self-depreciation. It was the presence of this element in Green which made him the leader of a school. Green's inspiration was more definitely religious than Sidgwick's, in the sense in which religion and speculative thought are one. Hence the intensity of feeling with which he grasped the fundamental conception of his philosophy and laboured to impress it on his generation. His intense feeling of the unity of the world prevented him to some extent from realising the ambiguities of his own formula, and they explain " the monotony and iteration " of expression to which his biographer refers. In spite of Sidgwick's preoccupation with the theistic problem, his interest in the universe was a more purely intellectual one and he lacked the overmastering speculative impulse which lies at the root of all philosophical systems. " As to the riddle of the Universe," he says, " I never had the presumption to hope that its solution was reserved for *me*, though I had to try." This is not the spirit in which knight after knight has ridden out to take " the dark tower ". The words **may**

be contrasted with an utterance of Green towards the close of his life: "I thought I had got hold of a key which I find now will not unlock so much as I fancied it would. But I must make a push now, or I shall leave the world with nothing done." Not so different in mood, the two sayings yet reflect strikingly the different starting-points and methods of the two writers. In the vital interests of philosophy it is no doubt better to embrace a supreme hypothesis like Green, even though the formula should on closer examination prove lacking and require much re-casting. This is what has happened in the subsequent history of Idealism in England, but it is a great thing to supply a generation with a principle by whose aid it may unify its moral and intellectual life. Sidgwick was constitutionally incapable of playing such a part. At a meeting of the Psychical Society, in whose investigations he was so deeply interested, he describes himself as "pouring cold water in a lucid and impartial manner" on more than nine-tenths of the experiences brought forward. Something of the same paralysing effect was produced by the keen play of his critical faculty on the systematic attempts of contemporary philosophy. But the lesson of scrupulous intellectual honesty is one no less important to be learned; and while acknowledging the weakness associated with the critical nature, Sidgwick rightly claims it as the source of his strength. As he puts it modestly in his delicately balanced way: "Certainly I find my self-criticism an obstacle to energetic and spirited work, but on the other hand I feel that whatever value my work has is due to it". Philosophy has need of both temperaments and uses both to help her on her way.

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*The Philosophical Radicals, and other Essays; together with Chapters Reprinted on the Philosophy of Religion in Kant and Hegel.* By A. SETH PRINGLE-PATTISON, LL.D., Fellow of the British Academy, Professor of Logic and Metaphysics in the University of Edinburgh. Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood & Sons. Pp. x, 336.

THE volume before us contains a collection of Essays and Reviews which have appeared in various magazines during the last few years, together with two important papers reproduced from books which have long been out of print. All the writings here brought together are well worth republication in their present form; and there is no need to add that in every case their literary form is marked by a brilliancy, clearness, and force reminding one of the philosophical work of a century or a century and a half ago, when the men who wrote on these subjects for English readers were men who could both write and think in English.

The exigencies of editorial space of course will not permit any de-