

SIR HENRY JONES

1852-1922

By the death of Sir Henry Jones on February 4, 1922, the Fellowship of the British Academy lost one of the oldest and most brilliant of its members. The impression which his vivid personality made upon all who knew him was deepened into love and admiration by the high-hearted courage with which he faced the long racking illness of which he died—setting a seal upon the teaching of his life.

In *Old Memories*, in the writing or dictating of which he employed his easier moments in the last phases of his illness, he has given an account of his early life which will live as a picture of the best type of Welsh home in the middle of last century. Born at Llangernyw in North Wales in 1852, he was the son of a shoemaker, and literally rose from the bench to what is perhaps the most famous chair of philosophy in the English-speaking world, the Chair of Adam Smith, of Thomas Reid, and of Edward Caird. After a long struggle as a student in Wales, he obtained a bursary which took him to Glasgow University, where he graduated in 1878 and was awarded the Clark Fellowship with the duties of Assistant Lecturer. During his four years' tenure of this office he attended classes in the Faculty of Divinity with a view to entering the Presbyterian ministry, but he had already found his vocation. In 1882 he accepted the post of Lecturer in Philosophy in University College, Aberystwyth, and, two years later, on the opening of the University College for North Wales at Bangor, he was appointed its first Professor of Logic and Philosophy. The atmosphere of Welsh theology in these days, and the influence it exercised over University appointments, is illustrated by the story told of his appearance before the elective body. 'We hear, Mr. Jones', said one of the electors, 'that you deny the Divinity of our Lord.' But the young candidate was equal to the occasion. 'It is not true, Mr. Thomas. I never yet denied the divinity of any man.'

In 1882 he married Annie Walker, the sister of his College friend now well known as Dr. Hugh Walker, for many years Professor of English Literature at Lampeter. To this lady's steadfast courage and tranquillity he owed the blessing of a home life, in spite of more than its own share of sorrow, singularly happy and free from worldly

care. He used to like to quote Hegel's saying that 'a man had made up his account with this life when he had work that suited him and a wife whom he loved'. His own account in both these respects not only squared but left an ample balance to the good.

During the seven years he spent at Bangor he established a high reputation as a brilliant teacher and not less successful public speaker on behalf of the new educational movement in Wales, which resulted in the Intermediate Education Act and the establishment of the University of Wales.

But Scotland had been the land of his philosophic birth, and in 1891 he returned to it as Professor of Logic, Rhetoric, and Metaphysics in St. Andrews. Three years afterwards, when Edward Caird left Glasgow to succeed Jowett in the Mastership of Balliol College, Oxford, Henry Jones was elected at the age of forty-two to the Chair of Moral Philosophy in his own old University. It would be difficult to imagine a more striking illustration of his own favourite doctrine of identity in difference than the contrast between him and his predecessor. The general principles of the Hegelian Philosophy, of which Caird was at the time the chief exponent in Britain, had become to Jones a philosophic faith from which he never wavered. But while Caird was occupied mainly in applying them to the interpretation of the history of philosophy, leaving his own views for the most part to be gathered from his criticisms of past thinkers, Jones sought to develop them directly in connexion with the issues of contemporary thought, and more particularly of life, morality, and religion. While Caird was the Evangel, Jones was the Pilgrim and Messenger of what he had learned in his House. His loyalty to it may have led to a certain impatience with some of the newer schools of thought, and even with some of the developments which Hegelianism received from other idealistic writers, but it never betrayed him into an unphilosophical dogmatism. The title of his last book, *A Faith that Enquires*, might be taken as the motto of his life. He believed in Idealism, but he believed more deeply in human reason and in its power to lead us into all truth. Another of his old Glasgow teachers whom he loved and admired only second to Caird was John Nichol, the Professor of English Literature, to whom as 'a great teacher' he dedicated his book on Lotze. He used to contrast the two men, each a god to him in his own sphere, in temperament and method. He was himself a delightful mixture of them both. He combined the fire, the wit, the *fight* of the brilliant poet and critic with the steadfastness and whole-hearted devotion to philosophy of the thinker.

In 1904 he was elected Fellow of the British Academy. He was knighted in 1912 and made Companion of Honour in the last week of his life. A few days before his death also he was awarded the Medal of the Cymmrodorion Society. Mr. Lloyd George, who was Prime Minister at the time, wrote on the occasion to express his regret at being unable to be present at the honour done to his 'dear old friend whose career and work will remain an encouragement and inspiration to young Wales for many generations'.

Henry Jones's first published work was on the 'Social Organism' in a volume of *Essays in Philosophical Criticism* in which several others, who have since become famous, among them William Paton Ker, Andrew Seth Pringle-Pattison, R. B. now Lord Haldane, and John S. Haldane, also first tried their prentice hand. In 1891 he published what perhaps is his best-known book, *Browning as a Philosophical and Religious Teacher*. In Browning's poetry, which shares with Hegel's philosophy the feature of interpreting the world in terms of spirit, he saw 'a settlement of the ancient feud between these two modes of thought'. Perhaps it was the share he himself had in both of them that was the secret of the success at once of this book and of his own life work as a teacher. In 1894 he published *A Critical Account of the Philosophy of Lotze* in which he showed better than anywhere else his powers as a philosophical scholar and critic. The book was hailed at the time by the translator of Lotze as 'a genuine contribution to philosophy'. In 1908 he was invited, during a tour in Australia, to give a course of lectures in the University of Sydney, which were afterwards published under the title of *Idealism as a Practical Creed. The Working Faith of the Social Reformer*, published in 1910, was the result of a similar course given at Manchester College, Oxford. In 1912 he wrote and presented at the Inauguration of the Rice Institute in Houston, Texas, three lectures on *Philosophical Landmarks, being a Survey of the Recent Gains and the Present Problems of Reflective Thought*. During the War he was asked by the Y.M.C.A. to contribute a book to its admirable scheme of civic education, and wrote *The Principles of Citizenship*. Meantime he was engaged on *The Life of Edward Caird*, and had written two-thirds of the biographical part when he was warned, by the threatened return of the disease of which it was hoped he had been cured by a previous operation, that the Gifford Lectures which he had been asked by his own University to give in 1923 must claim all his remaining strength. At the same time his friends felt that if he was to deliver these lectures no time must be lost. By the kindness of Lord Balfour, who had been appointed lecturer for 1921

and 1922 but was ready to exchange with him, he was enabled to deliver ten lectures of the twenty which he had prepared. As the course proceeded the space available for the crowded audience had to be curtailed on the ground of the failing voice of the lecturer. *The Life and Philosophy of Edward Caird* was finished with the co-operation of the present writer, and published in the autumn of 1921. The Gifford Lectures appeared shortly after his death under the title already quoted. In this book he tries to sum up his teaching on man's life and destiny. Whatever may be thought of it as a contribution to philosophy, of which I speak below, it is written in many places with a burning eloquence, and yet everywhere with a certain restraint and power of self-criticism that will give it a high place in the great series of Gifford Lectures.

Any notice of the life of Henry Jones, however short, would be incomplete which failed to emphasize his work as University teacher. He has himself, in a self-revealing passage in his *Life of Edward Caird*, described the atmosphere in which the Professor in a Scottish University, particularly the Professor of Moral Philosophy, finds himself: the eager responsiveness of the great mass of the large class of students whom he addresses, the difficulty of maintaining the purely theoretic attitude felt by 'a teacher who believes that nothing except morality signifies much', the responsibility that goes along with his opportunities, and the kind of success for which he may look. 'If he succeeds,' he writes, 'he can signify much in the life of his students and through them in the life of the community. . . . It is not a mere paradox to say that the Professor of Ethics *ought* to exercise more power than any other teacher except the metaphysician and the poet, but no one will believe the statement except poets and metaphysicians. And the greatest ethical teacher in all ages has some of the powers and exercises something of the function and influence of all three.'¹ I myself belonged to his own generation, and knew the Moral Philosophy Class only in Caird's time. But those who were Jones's students speak of the unique impression his lectures produced upon them. 'Sir Henry's greatest work', writes Principal Hetherington, who was one of them, 'I think was done in the 8 o'clock Class. . . . To the very end of his life he felt that his first duty was to it; and to it he brought the best of his gifts. Many honours came to him in the course of his life . . . but the recognition which he prized most, and which he counted as incomparably his greatest reward, was the affection of his students and their appreciation of the outlook which he sought to give them. . . . Few men went

¹ *Life and Philosophy of Edward Caird*, pp. 53-4.

forth from his Class unchanged in character as well as in mind, or without realizing the greatness of the obligation imposed upon them to serve their fellows by honesty of secret thought, no less than by probity in outward action. It was all to us students a most memorable experience. It was like walking on the high places of the earth. Most of us found the world opening up as we had never known it.'

This devotion to his work as a teacher was partly founded on a very sincere modesty as to his own powers as a thinker. His hope, he would say, was that, though he himself might be unable to make any fresh contribution to philosophy, he might kindle the fire in one or another of his students who should succeed where he had failed. He lived to see not a few of them in high academic positions in Britain, in the Colonies, and in America, who are likely to realize this hope, but it would not be true to say that this was his only success.

In trying to estimate the work of a philosophical writer we may apply either of two different criteria. We may adopt the test of original discovery in the sense of the power to break away from traditional lines and apply some new principle to the solution of philosophical problems. Or we may adopt the test of the power to carry some widely accepted principle into the different fields of experience with fresh insight and power. Of the former and rarer kind our own time has fortunately not been without example. To mention no others, the names of William James, Mr. F. H. Bradley, and Mr. Bertrand Russell readily suggest themselves. In thinkers of the second type contemporary philosophy may be said to be particularly rich. Among these it may safely be said that the name of Henry Jones will occupy a high place.

Accepting in his student days the general principles of the Hegelian philosophy as these were expounded by his master Edward Caird, he was well content if he could succeed in seeing where they led when carried out courageously and consistently to their logical issues in the different fields of experience. Of the great sayings of Hegel there was none that pleased him better than that which declared that 'the rational is a highway on which every one travels but no one distinguishes himself'. It is this criterion we must apply in attempting a short estimate of his position as a thinker.

Taking his idea of the work of reflection from Plato and Hegel as the endeavour to escape from the half-truths which are the result of abstraction by following the inner movement of thought itself, he conceived of philosophy as 'no quaint guest of star-struck souls which have forgotten their finitude and are doomed to range along

the horizon of existence, peering into the darkness beyond and asking questions of its emptiness'. It is 'the process whereby man, driven by the necessities of his rational nature, corrects the abstractions of his first sense-steeped experience and endeavours, little by little, to bring to light and power the real—that is, the spiritual meaning of his structure and of the world in which he lives'.¹ More particularly at the present time philosophy is concerned with the snares that are laid for the unwary by the current antitheses of finite and infinite, necessity and freedom, nature and spirit. 'When I endeavour to catch a glimpse of the trend of the thought of the present times', he writes, 'and to define, however generally, the problems in which it finds itself entangled and which it must try to solve, I find that it is occupied with some one or other of these dualisms.'² More definitely still he held that the trend of philosophy in his time was towards an exaggerated subjectivism. 'If we have despaired of resolving the subject into its object by way of materialism we have on the other hand not repudiated the opposite method of resolving the world into the subjective experience of one or more subjects. Subjective Idealism is still in vogue, for we say that reality is experience and in panpsychism the monadism of Leibniz is being resuscitated so that all reality is made to consist of what one may call spiritual points, which have only intensive magnitude and no body except their own activities.'²

This was an abstraction for which both the current pluralism and the current monism of his time were each in its own way responsible. 'So far as reality consists in particulars so far it pertains to each experience for itself alone; and so far the solipsist in theory and the egoist, a solipsist in conduct, are logically unassailable even though the proper place to put them be, as Schopenhauer said, the mad-house.' Similarly from the side of monism 'when it is affirmed that reality is experience "experience" is allowed to remain utterly ambiguous so as to carry *either* an objective or a subjective reference at will. Or when it is explained, as it is by Mr. Bradley, experience and therefore reality is said to consist of feelings, thought, and volitions, and subjective idealism reappears.'³ It was for this reason that Jones held that there was 'no phenomenon of modern thought that demands a closer diagnosis than the disease of subjectivism', and that his own main critical work was directed to such a diagnosis. And it was because he regarded Lotze's influence as so decisive in developing this morbid condition in the thought of his time that he

¹ *The Rice Institute*, vol. ii, p. 635.

² *Ib.*, p. 640.

³ *Ib.*, pp. 650 and 664.

made that philosopher's theory of knowledge the subject of searching criticism in the above-mentioned book.

That he was essentially right in this estimate of the situation the whole course of philosophical thought during the last thirty years, with its strong reaction in favour of objectivity, abundantly proves. But there have been two different lines in which redress of the balance has been sought corresponding to the familiar distinction between Realism and Idealism. On the part of Realism the subjective movement has been met by the attempt to give to the object known a reality independent of the knowing mind. What is revealed in knowledge from first to last, whether through the senses, imagery, concept or category, is real objects wholly unaffected in their substance and in the relations they hold to one another by the activity of mind. Knower simply coexists with known, and in the last resort (if it can be said to be itself known as specifically different from it) the mental is resolvable into a product or attribute of the physical.

It need hardly be said that this was not Henry Jones's answer to the problem of knowledge. Such a method of reply to the prevalent error seemed to him to be meeting the abstraction of a mere subject only with the opposite abstraction of a mere object. The realistic theory in its full range and subtlety had not yet developed in the years of which I am speaking, and in his later life Henry Jones perhaps hardly had the patience to try to master it in detail. But the ground of his impatience was the clearness with which he saw that in its essence it was an attempt to meet a onesided theory by the opposite onesidedness, and that this can only end, by a meeting of extremes, in a like scepticism of all real knowledge. If the problem of subjectivism is to find how anything can be true, the problem of objectivism is to find how anything can be false.

The only way, he held, to meet these self-destructive abstractions was once for all to effect a Copernican revolution in our whole mode of conceiving of the relation of mind and object. Instead of starting either with mind and ideas without inner relation to things, or things independent of mind and idea, we must conceive of the whole process we call knowledge as the movement of a real objective world in the medium of thought. Instead of thinking of our thought as an effort to enmesh reality in a net fabricated of its ideas, we must conceive of reality as an active principle revealing itself to us as we follow the lead that it gives to our thought. Thought and reality, subject and object, in this view do not require to be brought together. They *are* together from the first as the two poles between which lies the field we call our world, as inseparable from them as they from

each other. To search for an ideal world unpivoted on a real, or for a real uninterlaced with ideal elements, is equally vain. The ideal and the real are not two separate worlds but inseparable elements in one world, which from one point of view we may treat as constituted of ideas, from another as constituted of things, but which we divide between ideas and things at our peril. In his book on Lotze, Henry Jones applied this principle with a view to showing that the great German philosopher vacillates between the view of thought as merely formal and the view of it as real, and that when (as he is necessarily driven to do) he seeks to unite them he is unable to do so because of his inability to effect the necessary revolution in the assumptions from which he starts.

The line of criticism which he here adopts with conspicuous success Henry Jones intended to follow out in a book upon contemporary British thinkers, who he thought, like Dr. Ward on the one hand and F. H. Bradley on the other, had been unduly influenced by Lotze. We may regret that he never worked up the material he had accumulated into the form of a book. In the short course of lectures which he gave at the opening of the Rice Institute in 1911, on *Philosophical Landmarks*, we have, however, an indication of what he intended to do, and it is doubtful whether in a longer treatise he could have added to the clearness with which his own position as an idealist is stated as contrasted with that of these distinguished contemporaries. We cannot, at any rate, regret that the last years of his life were devoted rather to a constructive statement of the implications of his own view in the field of morals and religion.

Others who accepted the same fundamental principle, notably Edward Caird and Bernard Bosanquet, had preceded him as Gifford Lecturers. But in both of his courses Caird had occupied himself *more suo* rather with 'ideas in the form of history' than with a constructive presentation of his own philosophy of religion. Bosanquet, indeed, had faced critically and constructively the problem of the nature and significance of religious consciousness, and Henry Jones was always ready to acknowledge the debt he owed to his brilliant lectures on *The Principle of Individuality and Value* and *The Value and Destiny of the Individual*. But he held that partly from temperament, partly from what he conceived of as an inconsistency in his thought, Bosanquet had undervalued the positive side of the relation of the finite to the infinite, and by laying the emphasis on the self-transcendence instead of self-realization involved in all spiritual activity had failed to do justice to human personality. What he, therefore, set himself to do in his own Gifford Lectures was

to insist on the essential unity of the finite and the infinite in the field of morals and religion as he had elsewhere insisted on it in knowledge. The task he felt to be surrounded with difficulty: 'The way from the finite to the infinite has been always more easy for the feet of the pilgrim than the way from the infinite to the finite';¹ but he faced it with his usual courage and *élan*. Sweeping aside all attempts to relieve the pressure of the problem by conceiving of the object of religion as a God limited in power and goodness (this was 'to run away from the problem not to solve it') he sought to show that neither morality, religion, nor the relation between them to which ordinary human life bears witness are explicable except on the ground of the real presence of the infinite in the life of the finite. In a well-known section Bosanquet had laid stress on the 'hazards and hardships' of man's ordinary moral and social life, the failures and injustices of which it stands arraigned in contrast to the stability of the 'world of spiritual membership to which we truly belong'. To such a world man's temporal life truly points; but between temporal and spiritual Bosanquet finds a 'great ultimate self-contradiction', only to be resolved in a form of experience in which the finite as such is left behind. Consonantly with this view, the emphasis in his writings falls on the process of 'self-transcendence' as that which is characteristic of such a 'finite-infinite' creature as man. True this process is not wasted. It constitutes somehow an element in the absolute life. But it never seems to return upon itself. Something is dropped: in passing from appearance to reality the *self* ceases to be, or at least to be *itself*. From such a point of view it is little wonder finally that personal immortality fades into obscurity. Essential values are conserved somewhere, somehow; but as the individual soul, just as it stands, is not one of these, its survival cannot be a claim against the Absolute.

Taking this, with what amount of fairness we need not here inquire, to be the bearing of Bosanquet's doctrine, Jones uses it to point the contrast of his own. It seems to him to rest on a misreading of the fact. The world of claim and counterclaim which is conjured up by the individualist's imagination as the scene of constant failure has no real existence entitling it to be either condemned or acquitted of injustice. 'Hazard and hardship' there is, of course, in plenty in man's ordinary life. These are no illusions. But neither are they final fact, for there is nothing in them that the steadfast will to good cannot transform here and now into something in which it can rest and find security. It is of the very nature of

¹ *A Faith that Enquires*, p. 296.

spiritual activity that it cannot fail: 'No moral effort fails.' 'Every good act is in its way perfect . . . neither man nor God could do better.' Justice is not something for which we have to wait as the gift of the transforming power of an absolute experience. It is done 'on the spot'. 'I cannot pity any one for trying to be good, however hard and unrelenting reality may be.' 'Never has any one been sorry for having tried to do what seemed right or mourned over his attempted obedience to the will of God.'¹ These are characteristic utterances. In another they might seem mere optimistic bravado. To Henry Jones they are at once a simple reading of fact and the logical consequence of a view that will admit no ultimate severance of finite and infinite, struggle and perfection, appearance and reality, as though these belonged to separate worlds and were only to be brought together in some transcendent experience. 'When I read man's history what I find is not a finite creature trying to transcend himself and necessarily failing but a potency that is infinite in its nature operating as a spiritual being at a certain stage of its actuality and in response to certain circumstances. If either side of the human self had to be called unreal or deceptive I should call it his finite, fixed, and exclusive side. But the conception of the finite as self-revealing and self-realizing process of what 'is in its nature absolute and infinite averts the need of fixed and static entities and avoids the difficulties which spring therefrom.'²

With this strong emphasis on the perfection achieved in every good act, and on the solution of the contradiction between finite and infinite effected in the temporal life of self-conscious soul, we might have expected that the problem of survival would have appeared less importunate if not less important. This was not Henry Jones's view. He was too deeply committed to the supreme value of the individual soul as the highest revelation of the divine, and as partaker of its infinity, to be willing to tolerate the thought of annihilation and the ultimate failure that it seemed to him to imply. He had no belief indeed in empirical evidences of survival, and 'flings spiritualism, so far as these lectures are concerned, on his rubbish-heap'. On the other hand, he held that it is possible to establish immortality as a deduction from his main hypothesis of the nature of God and the human soul. From the side of Deity 'Belief in a God whose goodness and power are unlimited, which we have deemed essential to religion, is not possible *unless* the soul be immortal'; 'a single life

¹ *A Faith that Enquires*, pp. 163, 353, 306, 253, 254.

² *Op. cit.*, p. 190.

given to man would not exhaust the resources of infinite goodness. There must be "life after life in endless series".¹ From the side of man self-consciousness, and the right founded on it to the conditions of moral well-being seem to him to constitute 'a final claim that cannot be overridden by death'.² It is on such grounds that he expresses his fundamental faith that 'sometime, somewhere, in some life, under some circumstances, the soul will awake and apprehend its true nature and destiny'.³

Some may see in these arguments to establish a philosophical faith in God, freedom, and immortality, a strained attempt to find logical proof in a region where proof is neither possible nor perhaps desirable. Henry Jones, as we have seen, was keenly conscious of the hypothetical character of his own, as of all other philosophical constructions. But surely within these limits, if there is to be any progress in philosophical truth, it can only be by the courageous attempt to follow the logic of permissible hypothesis to its legitimate issue. It was to this task that his life-work was devoted. It must stand or fall—and it claims to nothing else—by the test of its logical consistency and its harmony with experience.

This is not the place for a detailed criticism of it in these respects. The present notice will have served its purpose if it has given some idea of the vivid personality that passed from us last year in Sir Henry Jones, and if it has in some degree been successful in indicating the place that he won for himself, and will, I believe, continue to hold in the history of a philosophical theory which, whatever its future may be, has played a decisive part in the intellectual development of our time.

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¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 344.

² *Op. cit.*, p. 341.

³ *Op. cit.*, p. 344.