

## FRANCIS HERBERT BRADLEY

1846-1924

FRANCIS HERBERT BRADLEY, born on the 30th January 1846, was the fourth child and eldest surviving son of the Rev. Charles Bradley, Vicar of Glasbury, Brecknock, and incumbent of St. James's, Clapham, and his second wife, Emma Linton. Charles Bradley was an eminent member of the active Evangelical group popularly known, in their own day, as the 'Clapham sect'; the church at Clapham had been specially built for him by adherents of the movement. In earlier life he had prepared pupils for the Universities, among others, Smith O'Brien and the late Professor Bonamy Price. Among his children by his first marriage was G. G. Bradley, successively Head Master of Marlborough, Master of University College, Oxford, and Dean of Westminster. Professor A. C. Bradley was a younger son of the second marriage. Emma Linton is recorded by her contemporaries to have been distinguished by her musical gifts and humour, the second equally characteristic of her son, the philosopher. In 1854 the family removed to Cheltenham, owing to the state of Charles Bradley's health. Two years later, in 1856, Francis Herbert entered Cheltenham College, whence he was transferred in 1861, apparently not wholly in accord with his own preference, to Marlborough, where his half-brother had become Head Master. In his early school-days he had been strong and healthy, a keen football player, and, at Marlborough, an enthusiastic member of the Rifle Corps. In the winter of 1862-3 he had a serious attack of typhoid, from which he was at one time not expected to recover, and this illness was followed later in 1863 by pneumonia. This brought his public-school life to an end. It is interesting to note that he had begun the study of German in his Cheltenham days, and is recorded to have read some, at least, of Kant's *Critique* while still a schoolboy, possibly in an English translation.

In 1865 Bradley went up to Oxford as a Scholar of University. He entered fully into all sides of the life of the College, working hard and taking his share in undergraduate social activities and rowing. In 1867 he took a First Class in 'Honours Mods.'; but the 'Greats' examiners of 1869 placed him, as they had done R. L. Nettleship earlier in the same year, only in the Second Class. The full story of these awards furnishes matter for judicious mirth, but must not be told here.

The serious side of them is that they revealed the complete incapacity of examiners whose philosophical scriptures were the writings of John Stuart Mill to comprehend what philosophy meant to the brilliant younger men who were shortly to revolutionize philosophical studies in Great Britain. For the moment Bradley was naturally depressed and anxious about his future. He had no taste for the career of a schoolmaster, which had been suggested to him, and one or two disappointments, due presumably to his 'Second', made it seem doubtful whether he would be able to obtain a Fellowship which would enable him to work at philosophy. For a while he assisted his eldest half-brother, the Rev. C. Bradley, in preparing pupils for the University, until, fortunately for him and itself, Merton elected him to a Fellowship in December 1870, and so became his home for more than half a century.

I may, perhaps, be allowed to quote a graphic description of Bradley in these early days by his sister. Those who knew him personally in later life, when ill-health had set its mark deeply upon him, will still be able to recognize how accurately the vivid words describe him as he must have been before the first attack of the trouble which never left him. 'His outward appearance was striking; he was tall and upright in carriage; well and muscularly made, singularly handsome, with large gray-blue eyes under dark eyebrows and lashes, a well-modelled forehead, mouth, and chin; his head set well on his shoulders. It certainly was an arresting face—the severity of the upper part tempered by the nose ("too long for romance", as one writer described it), and the humour and sensitiveness of the mouth. His appearance was a fair index of his character. . . . His critical faculties were always keen, equalled only by his sense of humour, which was the delight (occasionally mixed with apprehension) of the house. He was a born leader, when he put out his powers, a strange mixture of daring and sensitive reserve. Though he had already suffered severe illnesses, he was strong and active, walking long distances, alone or with his brothers, over the Welsh mountains or in Yorkshire or Devon. Mentally he was very active, interested in politics, exploring in many directions, reading poetry both German and English, caring for music; in fact, in every sense alive.'

My own personal knowledge of Bradley dates only from 1891, twenty years after the period to which this description refers. By that time repeated attacks of illness had left their marks on his features, and the sensitive mouth was concealed by a carefully trimmed pointed beard. In all other respects the account of his wonderfully arresting and impressive appearance and bearing still held good. In

still later life his appearance, to my own thinking, became more hale, and in his last years the beard was no longer pointed but allowed to grow squarer. I used to fancy that by this time there was something of the look of a highly cultivated explorer about him. The erect and youthful carriage was maintained, in spite of ill-health, to the very end of his long life. The wide and varied interest in all sides of life and their expression in literature, poetry, history, memoirs, travels, never left him, in spite of the strict regulation and comparative seclusion imposed on him by the demands of health. Few philosophers have been less 'bookish' or *doctrinaire* in their appreciation of human activities.

Bradley's Merton Fellowship was bestowed on the old condition of being tenable for life but vacated by marriage. It may fairly be doubted whether a man of so many active interests would have been content for many years with the career of a celibate academic writer of philosophical books, had it not been forced on him by circumstance. If this is so, though we do not know what the British Empire may possibly have lost by Bradley's ill-health, we may say that it has been a great gain to British philosophy. It is no disparagement of the other distinguished contemporaries whose principal inspiration in philosophical thinking, like Bradley's, was derived from Hegel,<sup>1</sup> to say that by sheer force of originality and native humour, Bradley overtopped them all. In spite of his own persistent protests against the whole spirit of 'discipleship', and formal repudiation of membership of an Hegelian 'school', 'Anglo-Hegelianism' has meant in English-speaking countries, especially since the publication of *Appearance and Reality*, to all intents and purposes chiefly the views of Bradley, or what his readers have supposed to be his views. If he never formed a following of professed disciples (and he was never weary of insisting that it was the last thing he would wish), more than one well-advertised 'school' in this country and the United States has been his 'parasite' in the biological sense, subsisting wholly on the attempt to 'refute' him. In philosophical circles on the continent of Europe, though some of his contemporaries are favourably known as exponents and critics of Kant or Hegel, no member of the group but Bradley himself seems yet to have won recognition as a substantive thinker on his own account. In large part this is, no doubt, to be explained by his own marked personal originality, his natural command of an English style of singular piquancy, and his abundant endowment with humour, a potent if perilous gift for a philosopher,

<sup>1</sup> It should be mentioned that a further marked influence was that of F. C. Baur, of whom he had made a close study between 1871 and 1874.

in the possession of which he stands almost alone among the band of eminent contemporaries who were leading British philosophy into new fields in the last third of the nineteenth century. But the explanation is also partly to be found in the circumstances of his life. Men like Green, Edward Caird, William Wallace, and, to a lesser degree, Bosanquet, were first and foremost active University teachers charged with the hard and responsible task of presiding year after year over the education of numbers of the *studiosa juvenus*. Their primary weapon was the spoken word, and their first and immediate duty was to their audience, collectively and singly. Only those who have made the attempt for themselves fully understand how difficult it is to combine conscientious loyalty to the teaching duties of a University Chair or a College tutorship with the work of a systematic philosophical thinker, determined at all costs to probe every question to the bottom for himself. If the temptation to neglect the immediate work of the practical educator of young men for the sake of one's private and personal studies is met and vanquished, there is still the danger that the teacher will carry the legitimate immediate interests of the educator over into his other work as a speculative thinker. It is hard for him, when he takes his pen in his hand, not to write for 'edification'; still harder to resist the more insidious temptation to an edifying silence where speculation seems likely to be unsettling or practically dangerous. As Bradley himself has said, in our own country there has always been an unfortunate tendency to be suspicious of the thinker who busies himself with metaphysical problems bearing on religion or ethics simply from the desire to understand and without any of the *arrière-pensées* of the preacher or the reformer. Bradley's own position at Merton involved no direct educational work, and it does not appear that he ever undertook any. In the general business affairs of his College he took a most important part, often seriously impairing his health by the dutifulness with which he persisted in travelling from a distance in severe weather to take part in College Meetings at the greatest risk to himself. As a man of business he was held in the highest esteem by all his colleagues for his sound practical judgement, and his advice was invaluable, but he played no part in the teaching of the College, which was discharged for so many years by his colleague William Wallace. Thus he was free, as few of his contemporaries were, to give himself wholly to the work of hard philosophical thinking purely for its own sake. His books were his contribution to philosophy to an extent to which the same thing could not be said of Green or Caird or Wallace.

It could hardly have been otherwise, for physical reasons. In June, 1871, Bradley was attacked by a violent inflammation of the kidneys which had lifelong effects. The precise nature of the permanent trouble was never ascertained, but for the rest of his days any cold or bodily over-exertion or mental agitation habitually produced serious illness and weakness, which left him completely incapacitated. Hence for more than half a century he had to live an unusually retired life, and to husband his strength with the utmost care, though for the first half, at any rate, of this period he was able to dine regularly at the College High Table, except when actually ill or in inclement weather, and even to ride the bicycle. As he grew older, the attacks seem to have diminished in violence, but the necessity for constant care and avoidance of cold and draughts steadily increased and forced him more and more to lead a secluded life within his own rooms, and, in cold weather, at sheltered spots with favourable climate, in the South of England or of France. From 1871 on, it may almost be said that the record of the events of his life may be given in the list of the works which were the fruits of a constant meditation of life, all the more passionate and intense for the physical inactivity to which he was condemned.

Bradley's first publication, the now exceedingly scarce pamphlet on *The Presuppositions of Critical History*, was given to the world in 1874; his first memorable book, *Ethical Studies*, was published in 1876, and was thus the first, as it has remained the most brilliant, contribution of the Oxford group who had drawn their inspiration in varying degrees from Aristotle, Goethe, and Hegel, to moral philosophy. A controversy, arising from certain passages in the book, led to the issue in 1877 of the trenchant pamphlet, *Mr. Sidgwick's Hedonism*. The *Principles of Logic* followed in 1883, *Appearance and Reality* in 1893 (second edition with an important *Appendix* replying to criticisms, 1897), *Essays on Truth and Reality* in 1914. In 1922 the *Logic* was reissued enriched with a series of *Terminal Essays* and a number of additional notes and excursuses. It was intended that *Ethical Studies* should be reissued in the same way; Bradley was still entertaining this project in 1922, and I have no reason to believe that it was abandoned. He was also for many years (1877 to 1912) a contributor to *Mind*, where he published a considerable number of essays on psychological questions during the last years of the nineteenth and the first of the twentieth century. These essays have never been collected into a volume.

I may most conveniently mention at this point the Universities and other learned bodies which honoured themselves by honouring

Bradley. The University of Glasgow conferred the degree of LL.D. on him in 1883; in 1921 he was made a member of the Royal Danish Academy, in 1922 of the *Accademia dei Lincei*, and in 1923 a Corresponding Fellow of the *Reale Istituto Lombardo* of Milan. Our own Academy had invited him to be one of its original members, but the invitation had been declined on the ground that his health would not allow him to attend meetings or take any part in the work of the Academy. His wishes were respected, but the Academy was only expressing the long-felt desire of all the representatives of philosophical studies when, at the request of the late Professor Bosanquet, it elected him an Honorary Fellow in July 1923. The University of Durham also is known to have offered him its Doctorate, but his health at the time forbade him to be present in person to receive the degree, as the statutes of that University require. In June 1924 the King conferred on him the Order of Merit, perhaps a unique instance in our history of royal recognition of a philosopher. Bradley was the last man in the world to set any store on such honorary distinctions for their own sake. To him philosophy had always been her own reward. But he was always pleased to think that such marks of distinction reflected honour on the College to which he had been so long and loyally devoted, and enabled him to feel that he was making some return for what Merton had done to make his work in life possible. To friends who congratulated him on the Order of Merit he expressed his pleasure that philosophical studies, which are so commonly ignored by the 'fountain of honour', should have been recognized as one form of a citizen's service to his country.

In spite of long ill-health and the minor infirmities incidental to old age, Bradley seemed likely to be with us to well over the age of eighty. In September 1923, when I saw him last, he spoke of the future in a way which suggested that he expected to have some years of life still before him, and to all appearance the expectation seemed reasonable. Whether there was any alteration in the next few months I do not know, but his letters down to the summer of 1924 convey no hint of anything amiss. It must have come as a shock to most of his friends to read that he had died on September 18, 1924, after a short illness from blood-poisoning. He is buried in the churchyard of Holywell, in the same grave with a brother drowned in the Isis in 1866, within a few weeks of beginning residence as a scholar of New College.

The time has not yet arrived for a purely impersonal and historical consideration of Bradley's place among the philosophers of the world; if it had, the task could not be undertaken with propriety in this

notice, nor by the present writer. It is enough to remark here the immense influence of each of his three chief works on the subsequent development of philosophical speculation in the English-speaking countries. The *Principles of Logic* may fairly be said to have created the deeper and more philosophical study of logic in Great Britain and the United States; *Appearance and Reality* would be generally admitted to be the most considerable contribution yet made in our language to the metaphysical interpretation of the world. The influence of *Ethical Studies* on moral philosophy has probably been as deep and marked, but is not quite so obvious because it has been everywhere reinforced by the concurrent influence of Green's *Prolegomena*. There are characteristic differences between the two books, traceable to differences in the personality of their authors, but it has always been rightly felt by their readers that the attitude of the writers to the moral life and the moral ideal is at bottom the same; the differences discoverable are chiefly differences in emphasis. It should be noted that the two works seem to be virtually independent. Bradley had attended Green's lectures at Oxford and shared the veneration with which Green's character inspired all who came even remotely under his influence, but there seems to have been little or no further personal contact between the two philosophers; in later life Bradley used to express the view that Green's close dependence on Kant had an unfortunate effect on the permanent value of his work. The *Prolegomena*, on the other side, take no account of the work already done for moral philosophy in *Ethical Studies*. It must be remembered that Green's book was a posthumous one.

That a great deal of the literature called into existence by the *Logic* and *Appearance and Reality* has been devoted to the attempt to refute many of Bradley's conclusions is true, but this is only what he himself would have wished. More than once he publicly avowed his own unwillingness to found a 'school', and his conviction that what British philosophy needed above all things in his own lifetime was a 'sceptical' examination of first principles. In his correspondence he was accustomed to say that if his own work could provoke younger men to the undertaking of such an examination he should feel that it had accomplished all he could ask. The humorous incisiveness of his criticisms of other philosophers had nothing in common with the spirit of personal dogmatism; we may doubt whether it ever left any bitterness behind it, except when the sense of humour was defective in the criticized. To those who knew anything of him personally there was something heroic about this unflinching caustic humour; they saw in it the triumphant self-assertion of a

bright and brave spirit against constantly recurring suffering and infirmity which might have subdued a lesser man into dullness or morosity. In intention his most mordant sallies were wholly free from the desire to 'give pain to somebody' which has spoiled the work of so many genuine humorists. It is well known, and therefore there can be no indiscretion in mentioning the fact, that there was, after the publication of *Appearance and Reality*, some little tension between Bradley and his illustrious Cambridge contemporary, James Ward. Perhaps I may be allowed by the friends of both to mention that any feeling of this kind was terminated by a complete reconciliation. Just before Dr. Ward's lamented death in 1925 he allowed me to read the letter of ten years before, in which Bradley had made the first overtures towards this reconciliation, and accompanied it by a letter to myself which does no less honour to his own memory. I learned afterwards that Ward's thoughts were occupied on the last day of his own life with a letter he meant to write to me about the right choice of language for the dedication of the second volume of *Contemporary British Philosophy* to Bradley.

There is one misconception against which a protest must be entered, even in a notice like this, which purposely abstains from the task of critical valuation. Bradley has been accused in certain quarters of an 'inhuman intellectualism', whatever that may mean. The charge is a singular one to bring against a philosopher who wrote in his best-known work that metaphysics is the finding of bad reasons for what we believe on instinct. It involves a personal injustice which calls for protest and correction. If Bradley's books are, in a sense, his life, it is equally true, as all who knew him are aware, that he lived his philosophy with an exceptional intensity. It may be said of him, as was said by Byron of Shelley, a poet for whom Bradley had a lifelong love, that he had framed an ideal and lived up to it 'to the letter'. This was the secret of the profound impression he regularly made on men who were brought into association with him by the life of the College, even when they were indifferent to, or contemptuous of, the special pursuits he had most at heart. It is a saying of his own that for some men metaphysics is a way of 'experiencing the divine'. With him this was pre-eminently so. The pure intellectual value of his metaphysical construction it must be left to time to determine; for himself the 'speculative life' had the incommunicable personal value of all forms of the 'mystic way'. It was the expression in act, prolonged through a protracted life of much difficulty and endurance, of the certain and assured presence of the things which are unseen and eternal. Nor was there any lack

of warmth about his human relationships. Probably only a few of his closest friends and the members of his own family circle could tell how deep his most intimate affections were, but all who were admitted at all to his friendship must have felt their own egotisms and littlenesses abashed by his inexhaustible kindness, his interest in their work, their personal minor worries, their physical health. Lifelong struggle with grave disease is apt to make even men of fine mould unsympathetic to the lesser physical troubles of their fellows; it was characteristic of Bradley that though he said little in his correspondence about his own illnesses, he was exceptionally solicitous about much slighter disabilities in his correspondents. He will long remain the most impressive figure of his time for students of philosophy who speak the English language and inherit the British tradition of life; to those of us who were privileged to know him, he must remain even more impressive as an example and an inspiration to noble life in the face of adverse circumstance. *Quam minus cum reliquis versari quam tui meminisse.*

A. E. TAYLOR.

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It is hoped that this list may be complete, but its completeness is not guaranteed.