

## JAMES WARD

1843-1925

JAMES WARD, one of the original Fellows of the Academy and a corresponding member of the Institute of France, died at his house in Cambridge on 4th March 1925, at the age of eighty-two. He had been knocked down by a motor-car ten weeks previously, suffering concussion and a number of bruises; but he recovered sufficiently to resume work in January and continued lecturing, though somewhat intermittently, until within a few days of his death.

For nearly fifty years he had been a resident Fellow of Trinity College, serving his college as lecturer and tutor until appointed, in 1897, to the newly founded professorship of Mental Philosophy and Logic. But before he found the work to which he devoted his life, he had had a training and career which it is of interest to remember, seeing that they left their mark upon his mind. Speaking on one occasion of the Fellowship competition, he recalled the fact that some of the electors objected to him strongly because of his age; 'I wonder what they would have said', he added, 'if they had known that I left school for good at thirteen'.

He was born at Hull on 27th January 1843; but his family was settled in Liverpool, and there or in its neighbourhood his boyhood was spent. He was sent first to the Liverpool Institution and later to a preparatory school at Parkgate kept by a St. John's (Cambridge) man, who trained his boys chiefly for Rugby; and to Rugby young Ward expected to go in due course. 'Had I done so,' he said, 'I should have found Sidgwick head of the school.' Events worked out otherwise. His father was a business man of inventiveness and enterprise, but without much insight into character or real knowledge of affairs; on his first venture he lost the capital with which he started; although he was fertile of projects they seldom met with much success; and thus, at a time of financial crisis, his eldest son had to be withdrawn from school. From that day for some years the boy taught himself, and his education was sufficiently remarkable. He was allowed to roam at will over the sandhills near his father's house at Waterloo, a village (as it was then) near Liverpool, and there, watching the ways of birds and eagerly examining the wonders of the shore, he was soon a naturalist in the making. Then he discovered the (recently opened)

Free Library of Liverpool and borrowed books on natural history and mechanics; he set himself to work at school subjects again: revised his Latin and Greek and taught himself algebra from Colenso's *Algebra*, which he purchased. He amused himself also by drawing, and this accomplishment, employed by his father to illustrate one of the latter's inventions, ultimately led, when he was between fifteen and sixteen, to his being apprenticed to a firm of architects. The work of the drawing-office left opportunities for conversation; and young Ward became an ardent debater on politics and life. Of course he was a radical; his family environment was liberal and nonconformist; and gradually his experience convinced him that he could not be satisfied with the work of an architect's office. His thoughts turned to the Christian ministry; his indentures were cancelled by the generous consent of the firm he served; and, at the age of twenty, he entered as a student at Spring Hill Congregationalist College (since absorbed in Mansfield College, Oxford). He spent six years there, going through the regular course, taking the London degree at the end of three years and then studying theology. Provided with a scholarship, he then went to Germany, entered as a student of theology at Berlin and studied under Dorner. More and more, however, philosophy became a dominating interest; he was advised to spend the following summer session at Göttingen, and he attended Lotze's lectures until the University dispersed owing to the outbreak of the war of 1870.

Before he left for Germany he had been offered and had declined the pastorate of the Congregational Chapel at Cambridge. On his return to England the charge was still vacant, and the offer was repeated and accepted. The members of the congregation were desirous of a 'cultured ministry' and not averse from a somewhat liberal tone in the pulpit. But complications soon arose; many of the members who admired his preaching trembled for their young minister's soundness in the faith; it appeared, too, that broad theology did not extend the subscription-list for the new church which the congregation were anxious to build; and Ward, when he saw that there was likely to be dissension among them, demitted his charge. He had been in full charge of the congregation for a little more than a year, but had not been ordained.

Thereupon he joined the University as a non-collegiate student, but at first without any definite plan of study. Hearing, however, that Trinity was about to offer a scholarship in the moral sciences, open to any member of the University, he read for and obtained it. In 1875 he was elected to a fellowship, also offered for the moral sciences, from amongst a number of distinguished competitors: three out of the four

candidates were afterwards among the original Fellows of the Academy, named in the Charter of Incorporation ; the fourth became a bishop.

Such was his preparation for the career of teacher and thinker which he followed for fifty years. He did not bemoan the loss of 'early advantages'; his experience had taught him self-reliance and quickened his initiative ; he had found out things for himself and also found himself and the life which suited him. It was therefore not mere theory but also his own experience that led him to stress the fact of activity in the interpretation of mind, the method of trial and error in its growth, the greater importance of guidance than instruction in education, and the value of freedom in the whole of life. His boyhood disclosed certain characteristics of his own intellectual activity. Foremost amongst them were these two : first, interest in nature and in science—keen observation of natural fact, whether living or lifeless, together with a passion for 'putting two and two together', for finding an explanation and testing it by experiment ; and secondly, an insight into what lies behind the show of things—into the spiritual significance of nature and man's life. And these characteristics never failed in his thinking. It would be difficult to name any other philosopher whose writings are so full of graphic and apposite illustrations from nature and natural science.

I have recorded the bare facts of the first period of his career much as I heard them from himself. But these were external incidents in a spiritual history still more remarkable. Letters have been preserved—letters to his family and to one life-long friend among his fellow-students—which show the intensity of the conflict through which he passed. Through all his vicissitudes of health and fortune and family he had one persistent aim—to publish the truth and to live by it, and to seek it if lost. He was bred in a stern and unbending Calvinism—a creed which is less than a memory to the present generation ; but readers of Ward's letters can see what a living force it was for him. Doubt as to its truth only arose after he had devoted his life to the ministry and gone to a Theological College ; the years that followed were years of storm and stress, from which he emerged not without loss, but still holding to his faith both in goodness and in reason. It is unnecessary to dwell on these experiences here, for the whole story has now been told with perfect sympathy and candour in a Memoir<sup>1</sup> of enthralling interest ; but they are mentioned because, as his biographer says, they 'were to a very great extent the formative experiences of his life and character, though they remained utterly unknown to the

<sup>1</sup> Prefixed to *Essays in Philosophy*, 1927 (pp. 1-96).

larger number of those who became his friends and familiars in later life. He buried the past, he burned his boats: but he remained for all that a native of other shores.'

Ward's fellowship dissertation was on 'The Relation of Physiology to Psychology'. It was printed for the convenience of the electors but was never published, though a portion of it ('An Attempt to interpret Fechner's Law') appeared in the first volume of *Mind* (1876). He had still the inclination to produce original work in natural science, or to prepare himself yet more elaborately for the double role of psychologist and philosopher. Two short communications to *Nature* (1874) on 'Animal Locomotion' show one direction of his interests; and in 1876 he spent the better part of a year in Ludwig's laboratory at Leipzig, following this up by work on the crayfish carried out in the physiological laboratory at Cambridge. The fruit of this physiological work was two considerable papers, (1) 'Ueber die Auslösung von Reflexbewegungen durch eine Summe schwacher Reize', published in *Archiv für Physiologie* (1880), and (2) 'The Physiology of the Nervous System of the Freshwater Crayfish', published in *The Journal of Physiology* (1879). Huxley, in his monograph on the crayfish, referred to Ward's 'interesting and important experiments', and Michael Foster about the same time spoke of him as 'a good physiologist spoiled' by philosophy. It would have been juster to call him a good psychologist bent upon making his foundations secure, for even in his physiological research he was working up towards the level of mind. 'There is not the least chance of my forsaking psychology for physiology', he wrote from Leipzig: 'I simply wish to know all I can of what Sidgwick calls "the margin of psychology"—the physical aspects of the psychical.' He saw also the possibility of applying systematic experiment for the exact description of facts of mind, and, at a time when there was no such laboratory either in Germany or in America, he brought forward a proposal for establishing in Cambridge a laboratory for experimental psychology; but, owing to the opposition of a well-known mathematician, who was interested in philosophy but feared materialism, the proposal had to be dropped for many years. Throughout his later work he followed closely the results of experimental researches, though they do not seem to have contributed much to his psychological views, and perhaps he was disappointed not in their quantity but in their significance.

In 1878 he began to lecture on psychology for the Moral Sciences Tripos, although he was not appointed a regular member of the College staff until 1881. From the first it was clear that he had something new to say and a fresh method of saying it; and, throughout a long

career, his power of interesting his audience never failed him. The following record describes an hour with him some fourteen years ago :

‘The first time I ever saw him was at a lecture, and I remember it well. He came slowly into the small room—there were only about eight or nine students—his long, spare form struggling into his gown, his very keen and penetrating eyes taking us all in. It was the first lecture of the year, and there was a certain ritual to go through before he could begin to talk. He must find out who we were, and what we proposed to do, and he must discourage us a little so as to put us into a proper frame of mind. “Well, I don’t know why you come to me ; I don’t know what you expect to get out of me ; but whatever it is I expect you will be disappointed.” Then he sat down. Out came half a sheet of note-paper which he by no means needed, and for an hour he talked and we were literally held in spell. There was no hesitation, the right word seemed always to come, the illustrations were frequent, brilliant, and human, the asides and reminiscences were full of fun. There was little formality. Nobody could do much in the way of taking notes. But I do not think he ever sacrificed a serious point to make a quip, although he never strangled humour to preserve solemnity.’<sup>1</sup>

In 1884 Ward married Miss Mary Martin, a lecturer of Newnham College. The house in which they settled and the garden which he planned and tended and loved became a hospitable centre to which generations of students and philosophers from all parts of the world gravitated.

Ward’s literary activity<sup>2</sup> falls roughly into two periods. Up to about 1895 his published work was almost entirely psychological ; after that date, it was predominantly, though by no means exclusively, philosophical. The distinction is far from absolute, however. As a psychologist he looked ahead to the philosophical bearings of his views ; he did not fit his psychology into a pre-conceived philosophical setting ; to say that he did so would be entirely to misconceive his work and his mind ; but he was always alive to the philosophical consequences of his psychological theories, and on occasion he published

<sup>1</sup> F. C. Bartlett, *American Journal of Psychology*, 1925, p. 453.

<sup>2</sup> A bibliography of his writings will be found in *The Monist*, Ward Commemoration Number, January 1926. To the titles there given should now be added (1) ‘A Theistic Monadism’, in *Contemporary British Philosophy*, second series, 1925 ; (2) ‘An Introduction to Philosophy’, in *The Monist*, January 1926 ; (3) *Psychology applied to Education*, edited by G. Dawes Hicks, 1926 ; (4) *Essays in Philosophy*, with a memoir of the author by Olwen Ward Campbell, 1927. The last-named contains twelve essays, four of which had not been printed before. There are articles on Ward’s philosophy by Professor G. Dawes Hicks in *Mind*, July 1925, and *The Hibbert Journal*, October 1925, and by Professor G. F. Stout and others in the above-mentioned number of *The Monist*.

philosophical papers. Later on, in spite of pre-occupation with philosophy, his interest in psychology never ceased, and even he cannot have regarded his work in it as over before the publication of *Psychological Principles* in 1918. He was an incessant worker, but not a very rapid writer; and his standard for his own work was so high as to make him chary of publication. Even the great *Encyclopaedia* article on Psychology (1886), which established his reputation, had almost to be torn from him by the fierce energy of the editor. But the article itself does not show any traces either of haste or of hesitation. It is written in a perfectly balanced English style, made attractive by the profusion and point of its illustrations from nature and human life; and the issue of the whole is a new view of the science, in which the old 'faculty' psychology has disappeared and the empirical tradition has been largely superseded and transformed. Had it been published as a book, even without expansion or revision, it would have been better for the author's fame and for psychological students. Even as it was, accessible only in the unwieldy volume of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, its effect was profound upon other teachers and writers, and its leading doctrines permeated the literature of the subject and facilitated new developments. Often the source of these doctrines has been forgotten; sometimes they have been put forward again and renamed as if they were new discoveries—and that perhaps is an incidental result of the form of publication.

Ward's new ideas had been taking shape in his mind for a long time. In 1880-1 he printed (for discussion by a small Moral Sciences Club) a series of papers on General Analysis of Mind, Objects and their Interaction, the Law of Relativity, and Space and Time.<sup>1</sup> And these papers, as well as the material which he had prepared for his lectures, were drawn upon when he came to write his article for the *Encyclopaedia*. In spite of all that has been done since, by the author himself and by others, this article can never be neglected by any one interested in the history of psychology. It is impossible to give an adequate account of it in this place, but some of its more novel and characteristic features should be mentioned.

The most controversial of his doctrines concerned the standpoint of the science and what he called the 'general analysis' of mind. Neither the physiological approach nor the beginning with sensations or presentations as ultimate data could satisfy him or withstand his

<sup>1</sup> They were not published by Ward himself; but the late W. T. Harris received copies of them, when on a visit to England, and published one of them and part of another in his *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* (St. Louis, U.S.A.), 1882-3.

criticism. 'The standpoint of psychology is individualistic,' he said; 'by whatever method, from whatever sources its facts are ascertained, they must—to have a psychological import—be regarded as having place in, or as being part of, *some one's consciousness*.' By 'consciousness', as he uses the term here, he means that where and only where we have object presented to a subject we are in the domain of mind; the other sciences disregard this fact of presentation as irrelevant for their purposes; but it is fundamental for psychology and psychology cannot transcend it. The 'subject' is not to be identified with the soul of rational psychology or with the mind-stuff of some later theories. But it is not a mere passive recipient of presentations; it feels and it acts (or attends). Neither the feeling nor the activity is part of the object: they are not presented, and they characterize the subject.

From this point of view his whole psychological work is elaborated. Bain, in a generous and appreciative review of the article, confessed himself 'staggered by the aggrandisement of the subject'. And it was natural that he should be, for Ward's doctrine undermined the assumption that it is possible to start with sensations as the ultimate elements out of which the life of mind is formed. But the subject never stands by itself; it always implies object; it is affected pleasantly or painfully, and it reacts upon object by way of selective attention. Perhaps Ward never made quite clear his attitude to the 'new realism' which was propounded subsequently, and critics have found a trace of subjectivism in his identification of objects with presentations. But he was emphatic in rejecting the view which looks upon these presentations as 'subjective modifications'; for him the ultimate fact, as far as psychology is concerned, is subject-object, and it is impossible to reduce one element in the duality to the other. Further, corresponding with the continuity of the subject, the object is presented as a continuum, in which differences and other relations are gradually discriminated, leading to the perception of things—of objects distinct not only from the subject but from all presentations whatever.

Consistently with this fundamental position a system of psychology was worked out in little, and it contained many points of novelty, as in his account of space and of time, his clear distinction between the perception and the conception of each, his bold extension of the doctrine of secondary automatism, and his emphasis on the importance of subjective, as well as natural, selection in the growth of mind. One point on which great stress is laid in his later doctrine is inadequately recognized. This is the function of intersubjective

intercourse in the growth of knowledge. There is a hint of it in a foot-note (p. 75 a) and it seems to be implied in what is said of the social origin of the conception of self as a person; it was probably crowded out by exigencies of space, for the term had been used and the importance of the process emphasized in an earlier article (*Mind*, 1883, p. 164).

Ward was always doubtful whether he had done right in publishing his views in the form of an *Encyclopaedia* article. He sacrificed his book to the article and so destroyed, as he tells us, one of the dreams of his life. After all, however, it was only a projected book that was sacrificed; and Ward seems always to have required some stimulus from outside to induce him to publish. Left to himself he would have waited until he had wrung its whole secret from a reluctant universe. Some social obligation was needed to make him consent to publish anything that fell short of perfection in his own eyes. So it came about that a supplementary article on psychology appeared in the tenth edition of the *Encyclopaedia*, and a further article, fusing the results of the two preceding, in the eleventh edition (published 1911), and this opened the way for the systematic elaboration of his doctrines published as *Psychological Principles* in 1918. In this way, after many years, his early dream of a book on psychology achieved fulfilment.

His other books were written in response to similar though less exacting conditions. His appointment to a Gifford lectureship, first at Aberdeen and afterwards at St. Andrews, led to his two books, *Naturalism and Agnosticism* (1899) and *The Realm of Ends* (1911). His *Study of Kant* (1922) arose out of the invitation extended to him by the Academy to deliver a lecture on Kant. That his estimate of his great predecessor might be well grounded, he set himself to re-read Kant's own writings and worked through the great mass of Kantian interpretation and criticism. Out of this grew in the first instance his book—a concise but comprehensive criticism of each step in the Kantian argument. Only when this had been completed did he feel himself free and prepared to sum up the significance of the man and his work in a lecture to the Academy.

Ward's own philosophy is contained in the two former of the three books named above. To begin with, his work is critical of the theories, naturalistic and agnostic, which were prevalent in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Criticisms similar in intention had been often urged from the standpoint of idealism, but Ward was original in his method. He set himself first of all to make clear the distinction between science and the philosophical theories to which it



was supposed to lead, and this opened the way for his refutation of naturalism with its satellite doctrines such as the mechanical theory of reality and psychological parallelism. It is not an exaggeration to say that Ward's criticism gave the final blow to the competency of naturalism and of its alliance with agnosticism as promulgated by Spencer and other leaders of thought at the time. If naturalism has reappeared in later philosophy it has been in a different form and with some protective colouring to guard it against criticism so damaging.

Ward's philosophy of science led him to put forward a theory of reality. 'Is it not plain', he said, 'that reality consists in the concrete things and events that science sets out from, and not in the network of relations which is its goal? If then, as rational beings who have other ends in life than calculating and classifying, we want to interpret and understand the full meaning of the world, must we not return to it in its fulness and variety?' When, in this way, we seek to return to reality, we must take note of the fundamental abstraction from which science proceeds. It treats facts of experience as if they were not experienced. Psychology, in recognizing the subjective aspect, is nearer reality than the sciences, which restrict their view to the objective aspect of things; psychologically, as Ward held, we cannot get behind the duality of subject-object; and in philosophy we must, as he often urged, start *in mediis rebus*—with an experience, therefore, which implies subject-object. This position has its own difficulty, when we try to understand it. The 'duality of subject-object' was put forward as an alternative to the Cartesian dualism to which he traced most of the errors of contemporary philosophy. He cannot therefore mean that we can proceed with the analysis and distinguish a realm of pure subjects and another of pure objects. The pure object has certainly no place in his scheme; but within the duality the subjective element has a position of primacy. The 'spiritualistic monadism' to which his argument leads interprets the whole of reality from the side of the subject, whose objects are themselves always monads or arrangements of monads.

The monads which are the constituent elements of all reality are active beings each seeking self-preservation and betterment. And so Ward's first book ends with the words, 'the Realm of Nature turns out to be a Realm of Ends'. To understand the universe from this point of view was the aim of his second book, *The Realm of Ends*. He held, with Spinoza and Leibniz, that 'all individual things are animated, although in diverse degrees'. Self-conservation is 'the irreducible minimum essential to being in any sense a subject or self

at all'; self-development, still the aim of many, 'was perhaps at the beginning the aim of all'; and, when the conceptual level is reached, what is aimed at is sought *sub specie boni*. The way of conduct is like the way of knowledge; trial and error are the means by which man attains both to truth and to goodness. And as there is no principle of falsity, so there is no principle of evil; apart from possible goodness there would be no such thing as evil; the latter has no place in the world when interpreted as a realm of ends.

According to this form of pluralism reality consists of active subjects of experience interacting with an environment which consists of other selves; and these active beings have all a *nisus* towards goodness, in spite of the wayward paths by which they seek it. It was chiefly the presence of this *nisus* towards goodness in each individual that led Ward to see the unity of the whole from the theistic standpoint. He tried intellectually to make mere pluralism work and could not; he found it incomplete and unsatisfying, though not charged with inherent contradictions. On the other hand he did not think that theism could be proved, but he held that the idea of God alone enables us to co-ordinate our experience. 'Suppose', he says, and the illustration may be quoted as a good specimen of his style, 'the earth were wrapped in cloud all day while the sky was clear at night, so that we were able to see the planets and observe their movements as we do now, though the sun itself was invisible. The best account we could give of the planetary motions would still be to refer them to what for us in accordance with our supposition would only be an imaginary focus, but one to which was assigned a position identical with the sun's position. The pluralist's universe . . . answers to the wandering orbs that we see and God to the sun, which we are supposed not to see but merely to conceive as giving to their motions both reason and unity.' This illustrates his theoretical justification of theism. What may be called his moral argument was re-stated in succinct terms in answer to a critic: 'The world has progressed so far that the best of men are dominated by moral ideals, and the question arises: Can these ideals be realized? If they cannot, the world, in spite of this advance, is not rational: if they can, it is. But we know nothing that compels us to say that they cannot. At the same time theism and its corollary, a future life, would meet all our practical needs and give besides a theoretical completeness to our *Weltanschauung* that it must otherwise lack.'

To the working out of this *Weltanschauung* the second half of Ward's treatise is devoted. 'Theism', as he says, 'is not simply the possible crown and completion of pluralism: such a transcendent

modification will, it may be expected, change all.' What he gives in the sequel is not a system of philosophical theology but a series of reflections on the cosmology of theism. The universe of interacting spirits is not less real because God has been found; but their significance is heightened by being brought into relation with a father of spirits. Here the old problems of creation, providence, evil, freedom, and immortality arise and are elucidated by Ward from the point of view which he has reached. His discussions do not pretend to reach final solutions of these problems; they are chiefly remarkable for their insight into the significance of moral and religious experience and the way in which this insight is made to contribute to his speculative view of the whole. Perhaps he has laid down the lines for a future theology: if so it will be a theology of different character from the dogmatic theology of scholastic tradition.

Ward continued working till the end. His last book was published when he was 79, and several shorter writings appeared in the three years that followed. They were not marked by the novelty of much of his previous work, for his philosophy of life had been arrived at and given to the world; but in criticism and exposition they show that his mental powers were unimpaired.

W. R. SORLEY.