

FADS IN PHILOSOPHY.

BY THE EDITOR.

FADS are now the fashion in the philosophical world. When the old dogmatism began to break down, people acquired the habit of evading philosophical problems of a religious nature by saying that the questions as to the existence of God, the nature of the soul, free will and immortality, lay beyond the scope of science, and this philosophy of nescience is commonly called in Huxley's term agnosticism. It is understood that those who call themselves agnostics are really infidels; as a rule they do not believe at all, but prefer the more modest and non-committal name of "not knowers," for it is more convenient not to take a definite standpoint in order to avoid controversy on a topic which they do not care to discuss. But agnosticism bears on its face the stamp of transition; it characterizes a stage which is transient. It is too obviously a mere make-shift to prevent its negativism from being replaced by some positive affirmation.

In the course of events agnosticism led to pragmatism which promised a new conception of truth, but this new conception is practically a denial of truth as an objective authority. It degrades truth to a mere subjectivism. Pragmatists contend that if an idea works within my own experience, if it serves my ends, it is to be accepted as true, at least for me and pragmatists assume that that is all there is to truth.

On this basis real science becomes obviously impossible, for science would be a consensus, not of those who know anything about the subject in question, but of the most powerful and most influential minds of the age. In the meantime those views of Continental Europe which are also anti-scientific, have reached both England and America, and among them Nietzsche's philosophy has been most prominent. Nietzsche preaches a contempt of science, proclaiming the sovereignty of the ego and the coming of the over-man. His view developed from Schopenhauer's pessimism by inversion, and it also is acceptable only to those who reject an objective norm of truth and believe that the will should exercise control irrespective as to what the truth may be. The will is deemed supreme and the intellect is its handmaid who has to adapt herself to the wishes of her master. It proclaims the principle of immorality, which means

an absolute irresponsibility and the coming of the overman who is not a higher and nobler type of man, but a powerful ruler who would unscrupulously tread under foot his fellow beings and sacrifice them to his superior interests.

Nietzsche is very ingenious, and his books, especially *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, are very pleasant reading, but he has contributed nothing to the solution of any philosophical problem of the philosophy of science. His philosophy is purely a philosophy of attitude, and it is the attitude of noisy bluster which is apt to thrill immature minds with enthusiasm.

Very different, but in agreement with the principle that science is not a reliable nor desirable guide in life, are other recent tendencies which have produced a number of philosophies of a reactionary nature, basing themselves mainly on sentimentalism. It is noticeable that the representatives of this kind of thought are not so much thinkers and philosophers as prophets or leaders of certain tendencies, and do not take their stand upon investigation. Thus their success is mainly among the masses, who demand the satisfaction of certain individual needs and do not care for reliable scientific arguments, but wish to hear what will satisfy the needs of their longings. Most prominent among these leaders is Henri Bergson, and he is welcomed because he combines in his philosophy a certain liberalism with reactionary tendencies. He does not submit it to the traditional authorities in religion, yet clings to the antiquated principle underlying the outworn dogmatism, and so he revives some views long abandoned by science, such as belief in vitalism as well as a teleological interpretation of nature.

The most recent innovation in philosophy is more subtle and more ingenious than any of its predecessors. It is the proclamation of the principle of relativity with some bold paradoxical postulates, perplexing the unsophisticated masses but presenting a delightful spectacle to the trained mathematician who has here full opportunity to admire the acrobatic feats of an intellectual gymnastic of abstract reasoning accomplished in the mid-air of purely mathematical argumentation, which has little or no foundation in fact. The inner structure of the relativist expositions is logically and mathematically correct, but when applied to real facts their conclusions are bold assertions and lead positively to contradictions. The principle of relativity is proclaimed under a great show and with much pretense, and yet it seems to have been a mere fad that will soon be a matter of history.

We ask, "What next?" but we do not propose to answer this

question. We prefer to suggest that all these passing phases in recent times have been due to the lack of comprehension of the nature of science. Science is plodding on its way. Scientists use the thought-tools of science as if they were perfectly reliable, and most scientists do not care to investigate the philosophical problem of science. They leave its settlement to philosophy. They act as if there were a philosophy of science and as if science rested on a solid foundation, and we claim that it does. In our opinion the principles of science are reliable and the scientist may safely use his tools.

The philosophy of science that underlies scientific method and justifies its work is not a mere dream or assumption or hypothesis; it is well grounded on a rock; it is the rock of experience and the consistency of all experiences, which can be discovered on a close investigation; but the philosophical world has neglected a study of the philosophy of science and has preferred to give heed to the passing fads which have come and gone in a kaleidoscopic change.

The present age is an age of unrest. Much solid work has been done in all branches of life, in art, in science, in industry and in the social improvement of mankind. But we of the present generation seem to have lost our composure and equanimity. The mass of mankind seems unbalanced, and so there is a search for something startling, unheard-of and novel. We want to be original and prove that before us the world was absolutely wrong, that real life begins with us, that our predecessors have done nothing worth considering—we had best forget and ignore them; and the exponents of these tendencies propose new principles, new propositions, new postulates, new philosophies which are absolutely original, with the distinction quite common that what is absolutely original is absolutely erroneous.

We wonder whether the show is over and whether philosophical mankind will settle down in sober earnest to establish and accept the philosophy of science.

The philosophy of science is *the* philosophy, the only one, of which all scientists consciously or unconsciously are co-workers, and all who deny the possibility of its construction are its enemies.

The word philosophy may be taken either in a loose way or in the rigid sense of its meaning. It may denote the science of truth in general, the object of which is the foundation of science and its significance, or it may be contemplation of life, an attitude toward the world, an emotional disposition or a sentiment that sways us, the mood of our mind. In this latter sense every one has a philosophy of his own, yea this philosophy is not one and the same for-

ever. The philosophy of every one will change with the disposition of his character, with the changes in his destinies, with his age and with his surroundings. Philosophy in the strict sense, however, will not change. Philosophy in the strict sense is a systematized explanation of existence: and in this sense there is only one philosophy as there is only one truth, and this one philosophy is the philosophy of science.

Philosophy of science is objective, philosophy as a mood or attitude is subjective. The former exists in the singular only; it has no peer; the name of the latter is legion.

There is no quarrel between the two: they may exist peacefully side by side, just as mathematics will find no fault with a sonata or a picture or a poem. The many philosophies are like literary products, pieces of art, and why should they not exist? In the face of the same facts and living in the same world, in the world that alone has become and probably alone could become real, Leibniz proclaims his optimistic view that this world is the best possible because it can not be better, and Schopenhauer says it is the worst possible, because if it were a little worse it could not exist at all.

There need be no quarrel between the two kinds of philosophy except when any one of the philosophies of mood rebels against the authority of science and declares science to be an *ignis fatuus*, when it has no place for truth, the ideal of science, and does not admit the possibility of knowledge.

Strange that science exists and that we rely on science. Never in history has there been a religious faith which has justified trust in its authority or authoritative revelations as firmly and unequivocally as has science. We may become victims of error, we may make mistakes, we may be surprised one day that what we deemed to be true was not so, that we have misinterpreted facts or that our observations were faulty. But are there any scientists who believe that science did ever or will ever fail them, that a law of nature will change, that the constitution of the world, its lawdom, was ever different in the past or will ever be different in the future? If our trust in science is justified, science is established, and we claim that it is justified. If science rest on postulates, if the foundations of science are mere assumptions, if our trust in an approved hypothesis, our faith in science not well grounded—then we have no science, but what we call science is mere sciolism, mere pseudo-science and all our knowledge mere opinion.