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MY FIRST SERMON.

BY THE REV. DAVID JAMES BURRELL, D. D., LL.D.,

Pastor of the Marble Collegiate Church, New York City.

"Let her alone; she hath wrought a good work on me." Mark 14:6.

One Sunday morning in 1869, a young theologian sat in his room at Number 9 University Place in this city contemplating a sermon on the foregoing text, which he regarded as a masterpiece of clever composition. It was his first sermon, his "trial sermon," and not unnaturally he was eager to deliver it. The church bells had ceased ringing. There came a knocking at his door and, as if in immediate answer to his wish, a messenger announced that Dr. Joseph P. Thompson of the Broadway Tabernacle had been suddenly taken ill and somebody was needed to supply his pulpit. Would the young man preach? *Would he?* How true it is that fools rush in where angels fear to tread! The youth mounted the pulpit steps of the Broadway Tabernacle that morning with a degree of self-confidence that he has never been able to command even to this day. At the close of the service he was assured by some of the ladies present that his sermon was "simply beautiful"; he knew, without telling, that it was profound. His only misgiving was lest he had preached over the heads of his congregation. He realizes now that half a century has passed—for this is the fiftieth anniversary of that notable debut—that the sermon in question was "faultily faultless, icily regular, splendidly null."

SOME IMPRESSIONS OF PHILOSOPHY IN A FRENCH UNIVERSITY.

BY REV. WILLIAM T. RIVIERE,* M. D., B. D.,
*Professor of Bible and Chaplain in the University of
South Carolina, Columbia, S. C.*

In France education is free up to the Certificate of Primary Studies, which is frequently taken at 13 years of age, sometimes at 12. Also education is compulsory until the certificate has been taken or until the child is 14. On account of the greater length of the school year and the uniformity of the system, the actual amount of work done up to the point is perhaps more than at the same age among us. What the French call secondary education leads to the baccalaureate, in letters or science, usually taken at 17. While by no means equivalent to our B. A. or B. S., the degree represents a very substantial attainment in knowledge and mental development.

In the last year for the baccalaureate in letters the student has from two to four hours a day in philosophy. The course includes psychology, logic, ethics, metaphysics, and a brief history of philosophy. In the program for the degree in science, philosophy has a less important place, but ethics is stressed.

The bachelier-es-lettres on leaving his college or Lycée may enter the university proper, in one of the four faculties of letters, science, law, or medicine. There are also special schools of dentistry, pharmacy, etc. The time necessary for the sciences varies, five years in medicine, three in law, and usually two in science or letters. The chief requirement for all degrees is the examination, which may include dissertations and written and oral examinations. After the license in letters is the diploma of higher studies, a very stiff year's work. Then

*The author of this article is a minister in the Southern Presbyterian Church. He went to France as an officer in the United States Army. After the armistice was signed he entered a French university and in this article gives us the benefit of his first hand observations while there.

those students who wish to seek professorships as their lifework try for the aggregation, in a "conours" or competitive examination. Those who are successful (sometimes a half-dozen out of two or three hundred) are placed for life. Then finally there is the doctorate of the university, the highest degree in the French university system.

The Ministry of Public Instruction, whose chief is rector of the University of France, issues the programs for examinations for the different degrees. There is a system of promotion from *Maitre-des-Conférences* (assistant professor) to professor, from one university to another. So I suppose that some of the things I have observed about French philosophy here are representative. I have tried to verify them by questioning my French fellow-students, as well as by reading current and recent books and reviews.

Most of the students I know best are candidates for the license or the diploma in philosophy. Some are still in uniform, others wear in their buttonholes the little ribbon that means "wounded in the war." Also there are a number of "co-eds." Some of these students intend to teach philosophy, others are taking it as a side-line to their study of law. All tend rather toward the serious application to their studies which is perhaps commoner among graduate and professional students than among undergraduates in the States. Athletics, society, Y. M. C. A., all of great value among us, are represented here by organizations of less drawing power. I am inclined to think that is true even in normal times here.

The philosophy students here take most of their work with the professor of philosophy, the professor of history of philosophy, and the professor of sociology. Also they work on the ancient languages: most of them already speak English and know something of at least one other modern language. I heard one professor who had been conducting a course in Plato that always included reading the original text preface his course on Hume by the statement that to study modern philosophers, whose ideas are near our own, a translation may

suffice, but for the ancients we need their language to get their point of view.

As an illustration of the method here, I might cite a course in David Hume, one hour a week. The professor began with a lecture, including biography and bibliography. He discussed the difference between the treatise on the Human Understanding and the essays published later on the same subject. Then he outlined the work and assigned about half a dozen of Hume's principal theses to different advanced students. The next meeting of the class was taken up by a student with his paper on Hume's distinction between Impressions and Ideas and the discussions. Then came his Association of Ideas a week later. Other subjects assigned were Hume's position on Mathematical Certainty, with a reference to Kant, and Hume's Doctrine of the Human Person. In another class on the Meditation of Descartes at least one meeting is devoted to each meditation. The professor lectures, occasionally asks a question, and finally calls for a discussion. The study of Descartes' Ontological Proof of the Existence of God in the Third Meditation was especially full.

One of the most interesting of all the courses I have attended was one on Logic and the Method of Science, by M. Théodore Ruysen, one of the best known of contemporary French philosophers. This was a very interesting series of lectures based on a very extensive knowledge of the history and development of modern science.

The program for examination for the license in philosophy calls for thirteen or fourteen authors, including for this year Bacon, Locke, Auguste Comte, and Schopenhauer. In the latter, for instance, the class was finishing Book IV of "The World as Will and as Representation" when I arrived. A few pages were taken up every day. First a student, notified in advance, summarized the text, then read parts of it with comments and explanations. Then the professor asked questions, opened a free discussion, and finally completed the study by his own remarks.

Also there are papers from time to time in certain groups,

and occasionally a student is put in the chair to deliver a lecture which is then discussed generally. Among the subjects I heard thus treated were Scepticism, Criticism and Kant, William James and Pragmatism, and whether Science can furnish a basis for ethics.

I am inclined to think that philosophy is regarded as more important here than among us. In the program of studies for the present half-year at the University of Strassburg, just taken over by the French, the first subject mentioned is philosophy, and this department has as many professors as any other. This is by no means unusual in France. It seems that the reason for the emphasis on philosophy in the Lycées in France is that philosophy, following a good foundation in general culture, rounds it off and gives the student a *Weltanschauung*, and a philosophy of life. That is why they have it even in the B. S. course. In France philosophy has to attempt to do something that for us is done by religion.

And here is the fact that has most impressed me in the philosophy courses at the University of Bordeaux: they are trying desperately to get a moral science. Sometimes they go to Kant's Categorical Imperative; sometimes they try to work it out of pragmatism. But they feel keenly the need of a philosophical basis for the actual high moral ideal. The separation of Church and State, or rather the failure of the Church in France (Protestantism became chiefly a political party and was long ago reduced to a very unimportant place in the national life, and in the last half-century Catholicism ruined itself by becoming Royalist and reactionary) has left the people without a real moral guide. Little children memorize the fables of LaFontaine. Later they have school readers made up of extracts from great moralists. And the instruction in philosophy tries, as the student begins to think, to give him some principles.

In the university they discuss the possibility and the desirability of a science of ethics, of revising the moral standard. The other day I heard a young chap defend the position that science alone can never even arrive at the idea of ought. In

fact, they frequently call ethics, "moeurs," conduct, instead of morals. They go back to the original and lower meaning of the word from which we get "ethics." They all seemed to agree in the class discussion to which I just referred that science alone cannot give a normative ethics. And in my humble opinion they are having a hard time trying to give it with their philosophy. As for an impelling force, they admit its need, but cannot go much farther.

The idea of Christianity in the university seems to be always connected with asceticism. I have found that error, not unnatural where the monastic idea has been prevalent, even in a book by so eminent a scholar as Boutroux.

Several other things I have noticed may be of interest. Two candidates for the diploma have written theses on Jouffroy and Maine de Biran, Eclectics of Victor Cousins' group and largely indebted to Thomas Reid and the Scottish school. Sir William Hamilton is fairly well known here. Then I have noticed with some surprise that Bergson is better known in the United States than Boutroux. And also there is a great deal of pragmatism here: William James is very popular; but they give Charles Renouvier as the source of James' philosophy.