

THE
PHILOSOPHICAL REVIEW.

THE STANDPOINT OF EXPERIENCE.¹

THERE is perhaps no word more frequently employed in the philosophical literature of the present day than 'experience.' On taking up a new book, one not infrequently finds the author eager to acknowledge the sins of his predecessors and the discredit they have brought on philosophy by following the high *a priori* road, while at the same time announcing his own intention of founding his conclusions on the impregnable rock of concrete experience. Now I neither wish to deny that there are sometimes grounds for such criticism, nor that these resolves have often borne good fruit. At the present day, the proposition that philosophy must derive its results from experience would undoubtedly command almost universal assent. We all claim to be empiricists, in the sense that we seek to base our philosophical arguments and results upon the facts of experience. But what is often overlooked is the fact that this agreement is only verbal, a mere profession with the lips that carries with it no real unanimity of opinion. For experience, far from being a clear and transparent medium that presents to us facts in unambiguous and unmistakable form, is rather something so many-sided and complex, in some relations so shifting and unstable, as to be capable of yielding various and even contradictory readings. Not only is this true as a matter of fact, but from the very nature of the case it must to a large extent remain true. For the standpoints from which we view experience vary indefinitely with the nature of the ends and purposes that lead us to consult it. Any

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