

## PSYCHOLOGICAL LITERATURE.

*The Psychology of Peoples.* GUSTAVE LE BON. New York, The Macmillan Company. 1898. Pp. xx + 236.

As the title implies, the author believes that it is the psychology, chiefly the character, of peoples which determine their arts, institutions and history. The problems involved have been treated more fully in works on the civilizations of the East, and "this short volume may be regarded as a brief synthesis." "Each of the chapters composing it should be regarded as the conclusion arrived at by anterior investigations." The work is divided into five books dealing with the psychological characteristics of races, how these are displayed in the various elements of the culture of races, race-history determined by race-character, how psychological characteristics are modified, and the dissociation of race-character and decadence.

The central idea of the work is that races possess souls the acquisition of which marks the apogee of their greatness and the loss of which marks their decay. In this soul, sentiment, beliefs and interests are the moving and directing principles, and these constitute the basis of what the author calls character. Very meagre importance is assigned to the rôle of intelligence in the civilization of peoples, even beliefs being determined by suggestion and imitation so far as they affect the masses. Culture is merely a matter of memory: it can be acquired by inferior races, but does not affect character. Inferior races are distinguished from superior ones by differences of character solely; superior races are distinguished from each other by variations of both character and intelligence. Wide variations between individuals are the mark of developed races, but they do not count in determining the rank of a race. In estimating character, the masses alone are to be taken into account.

Ideas "do not exert an influence until, after a very slow evolution, they have been transformed into sentiments and have come, in consequence, to form part of character. They are then unaffected by argument and take a long time to disappear." "Religious ideas are among the most important of the guiding ideas of a civilization. The majority of historical events have been due indirectly to the variation of

religious beliefs. The history of humanity has always run parallel to that of its gods" (p. 235). "In religion, as in politics, success always goes to those who believe, never to those who are sceptical, and if at the present day it would seem as if the future belonged to the socialists, in spite of the dangerous absurdity of their dogmas, the reason is that they are now the only party possessing real convictions" (p. 178). "Faith is the only serious enemy which faith has to fear." "A people is only led by those who embody its dreams." The author gives an interesting account of the genesis of such faiths, a process in which reason plays but an insignificant, and suggestion an all-important, rôle. Propagation of faith is never by argument, and always by assertion, affirmation, impression. In time "the mere effect of imitation, acting as a contagion, a faculty with which men are generally endowed in as high a degree as are the big anthropoid apes," insures the spread of the idea; and then it is that it becomes a matter of sentiment and an element in character in the race. Then it is irresistible to argument. It is such factors of the common life of individuals which make the race 'a permanent being that is independent of time.'

The author holds that religious faith is the all-important moment in the life of humanity, but he considers the objects of religious faith to be 'illusions,' 'chimeras,' 'hallucinations' and 'the children of our dreams,' leaving the reader to infer that humanity is self-deluded. And this inference accords in general with the almost cynical and pessimistic tone which the author's thought at times assumes. He predicts that Europe will be swallowed up of socialism, and that America will be torn to pieces by an inter-race war between the incompatible elements that constitute her population. As to human nature in general, "of all the factors in the development of civilizations, illusions are, perhaps, the most powerful" (p. 207). The triumph of ideas "is insured when they are defended by the hallucinated and by enthusiasts. It is of slight importance whether they be true or not" (p. 206). "Doubtless it is man who created the gods, but after having created them he promptly became their slave" (p. 192). Is it cynicism, or is it simply a love for antithesis and epigram?

The work gives an interesting account of many of the facts of the race-consciousness and laws of its modifications. The style is interesting and strong. Many valuable suggestions are contained in the work. The author's personal philosophy of religion is, however, irrelevant to the theme, and rather weakens than strengthens the closing chapters of the work.